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Weird Tales

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the story of a modern Circe
By CLIFFORD BALL

THE RETURN OF HASTUR
a tale of the Ancient Ones
By AUGUST W. DERLETH

SEABURY QUINN
H. P. LOVECRAFT
EDMOND HAMILTON
and others

MARCH

25¢

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

COMING NEXT MONTH

THROUGH THE DRUMMING of the rain-drops and the skirling of the storm wind came a cry, sharp and shrill as pain, quavering as mortal terror: *"Au secours, pour l'amour de Dieu——"* The screamed appeal rose secant as a knife-blade, then stopped abruptly, held for eternity at its top note, as if the screamer had been throttled in mid-scream.

Mordecai looked up, eyes narrowed to the rain. A hundred feet away two figures, blurred in the driving storm, struggled with a third, and even as he sighted them he saw them drop a cloak or blanket over it and raise it between them as if it were a sack of meal or bale of merchandize.

Like everyone in Paris who was not armed with sword or knife or pistol, Mordecai bore an "executive authority"—a loaded blackthorn stick two inches thick and three feet long, secured to his wrist by a thong of rawhide. *"Halte-là!"* he shouted as he charged against the leveled lances of the rain. "What goes on here?"

They met his onslaught with a countercharge. Dropping their quarry to the walk unceremoniously, they separated, one to the right, one left, and rushed at him, one with a cutlass, the other with a nine-inch dirk.

The sworded ruffian backed a chopping blow at Mordecai. Had he used his cudgel as a guard the steel would have cleft through it, but he was no amateur with either quarterstaff or sword, and as the cutlass descended he dodged, swung back his stick and struck down savagely. The loaded bludgeon caught the poorly tempered blade midway between the point and hilt and snapped it short, as if it were an icicle.

"Pardi", the devil's in his elbow!" swore the disarmed footpad. "Upon him, Jacques! Give him the *coup de Père François!"* The loaded stick swung again and he dropped to the brick footwalk, blood streaming from his ears and nostrils.

The other bravo was not idle. Even as he struck the swordsman with his cudgel, Mordecai felt himself seized from behind. An arm was around his neck, a dagger flashed, he felt a blow above his heart that all but drove the breath from him. . . .

You will not want to miss this intriguing weird tale of the French Revolution, a romantic and appealing story that begins under the shadow of the guillotine. It will be printed complete in the next issue of WEIRD TALES:

SUSETTE

By Seabury Quinn

——also——

ARMIES FROM THE PAST

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A weird tale of adventure and the clash of armed men — an exciting story of time-travel and a world enslaved—of our planet two million years hence.

HELLSGARDE

By C. L. MOORE

A fantastic thrill-tale of the eery treasure in Hellsgarde Castle, and the dead men who stood guard over it — a fascinating tale by the author of "Shambleau."

THE RED SWIMMER

By ROBERT BLOCH

A tremendous story of the Spanish Main and an English pirate—a narrative of the Elixir of Life and horrible red arms that reached out of the sea, seeking their prey.

HYDRA

By HENRY KUTTNER

A unique tale of the fourth dimension, a dangerous experiment in occultism, and the ghastly horror that reached back from another plane of space.

April Issue of Weird Tales . . . . . Out March 1

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.
IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?
TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.
BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT

TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES
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SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS—
OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION
OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS
THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN
YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER
THAT'S $15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME
THANKS!

I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW—AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO
OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

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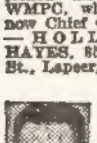

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"The strange lights made him giddy!"

The Metal Chamber

By DUANE W. RIMEL

A strange and curious tale about a scientist whose telepathic experiments contacted another planet, to his destruction

I MUST write this account carefully to avoid extravagance and inaccuracy. Certain emotional overtones will doubtless creep in, however, for I have been subjected to a train of events that might excite and bewilder any man. Still, I hope that some *natural* physical law will explain the phenomena which I have witnessed in the last forty-eight hours or more; I do not know how much time has slipped by since I fell asleep in my study and regained consciousness in surroundings so utterly strange that I hardly know how to react to them.

I am writing on the floor of a huge metal room whose lofty, arched ceiling rises some twenty feet above a smooth, glassy floor of a substance unknown to me. The walls are made of frosty-looking metal that reflects a partial image, and there are no visible doors

or windows. The method used in placing me here I do not know. I am an outcast in a huge vault; trapped, apparently, in a metallic tomb. And I cannot remember *how* or *why!*

Prior to this unexplainable episode, I had been studying telepathy in my laboratory near Hampdon, and had conducted several successful experiments on my Chinese cook, Fong Lee. Yes, I can safely say that I have advanced far along these lines; too far to permit a blundering, machine-crazed people to lay hands on it. What I have discovered would entirely corrupt society as it is practised today—society with its shallowness, lies and deceit. People would have to learn how to conceal from others their brash thoughts, and I dared not risk it, save on those whom I could trust. Even then I was careful how I questioned Fong Lee about what he had been thinking. Poor devil! I read every thought his queer brain was trying to conceal by spoken banalities, but told him only a portion of the entire mess, enough to convince me that I had probed beneath the surface and found what I had been looking for. How simple, brutal and animalistic human thoughts are! Man has so long reasoned differently that his spoken word indicated that once a means of mental communication were available, sensitive and delicate repression would have to be practised in order to conceal his selfish, greedy hates and passions.

When I try to remember exactly *how* I accomplished these things, my mind refuses to function. Apparently I have suffered some devastating shock and lost my memory—but I cannot understand why this loss of the past should concern only *certain* points. I realize that I performed wonderful experiments, and even carried some of them out to perfection; but the ultimate purpose behind all that work eludes me as though it had never been formulated. Am I to be forever separated by the wall of partial amnesia from realizing the possibilities of my discovery?

There are so many conflicting emotions—the strange room, the queer lights, and the sense of total alienation —that I am rather terrified. An explanation will develop sooner or later, and as an amateur biologist, I should not lose my head over some new, inexplicable phenomena. Perhaps I should state here that I do not remember exactly when I lost total consciousness, but it seems to have been near the night of March 20th, 1936. Before that, all is clear save those things dealing directly with and mechanically associated to my discovery.

For instance, I can remember the day I ran across my theory, and the marvelous possibilities it unfolded; and I even recall that my laboratory had something to do with it. But that is all. . . . The sensation is bewildering and maddening; trying to remember a dream of apparently dreadful significance and having the important factors evade one like the faery substance that visions are a part of. Perhaps some nervous stimulation or concentration will uncover those buried sections in my brain. The fact that I had discarded the idea of giving my knowledge to humanity seems significant; for it is probable that I turned to *other* fields of experimentation. . . .

BACK to this room again. I wish I knew more about architecture; I'm sure that I could appreciate more fully the unusual features of this place and gather new ideas on structure, placement and proportion. The geometry seems a little awry and dis-

turbing to the eye, but I cannot put my finger on its faults, if any. It must have been made for persons larger than I am. The lights, consisting of three large phosphorescent globes, are apparently hanging from the ceiling, though no means of support is visible from the floor. They emit an undefinable yellow radiance that seems to pulse about the room rather than shine.

When I first awoke in this place I lay sprawled on the floor near a strange, rubber-like mat, and for a long while I supposed this weird radiance to be a filtering of daylight creeping in about the shaded windows of my study. Then I opened my eyes, raised my head and gaped in sheer amazement. At first I could only sit and stare—a curious fascination for the moment overcoming my fear. Seeing that my wrist-watch had stopped at 11:51, I tried to reason out the whole thing. Later I found some sheets of paper in my coat pocket, and set them aside for future use. I inspected the room closely, tried to find an exit, and finally returned to the mat, where I have remained since writing the above.

MUCH later. I lay down on the mat and soon fell into uneasy slumber. When I awoke I discovered a queer-looking metal goblet standing beside the mattress. The mug has no handle and is very nearly cone-shaped, the top being smaller in diameter than the bottom. It was filled with liquid. Being extremely thirsty, I tasted the fluid. It was rather salty and thick, but seemed to contain food value. I drained the mug and have felt no ill effects. How different from Fong Lee's savory dishes! How was it placed here? And by whom? Perhaps these frosty-looking walls are not as solid as they appear to be. I must have more sleep. . . .

Upon waking this last time I discovered that the goblet had been refilled. I drank a little and replaced it beside the mat, but further out. I scraped some dust and lint from my pockets and sprinkled it all around the mug. Maybe they'll leave some footprints if they don't notice the change. . . .

Have I mentioned that I fancy myself being watched continually? As time goes by, the uncomfortable sensation increases. I have searched the place for traces of a peep-hole, but have found none. Why should the actions of a normal, prisoned man be studied by hidden eyes?

A strange dizziness has come over me. My memory is becoming even more faulty. Perhaps the queer liquid is drugged. Need more rest. . . .

LATER. I had a fantastic dream. It can't have any significance . . . but it seems horribly related to my present situation. I lay down on the mat as usual and closed my eyes. Then a maelstrom of power seemed to hurtle me far, far away—to a familiar place. Again I was seated in my study, reading. Suddenly I heard a loud, thunderous noise, very near the house, and I ran outside to see what had happened. It was very dark, but in the starlight I saw a huge metal, egg-shaped cylinder resting on my front lawn! The whole strange craft glowed with a dimly familiar phosphorescence. A terrible, gnawing fear seized me, rooting me to the spot. An oblong door opened in the side of the cylinder, revealing a large hollow space inside, and much intricate machinery. I thought I saw movement near the door; then some invisible hand grasped me by the arm and dragged me inside the thing. The door snapped shut; a clap

of doom. The sensation of terrible fear lessened as a dream-like trance enveloped me. A transparent section of wall lay before my eyes, and I gazed out. For an instant the familiar house was visible through the glass, then disappeared abruptly. Blackness enveloped me. My senses were whirled in the paralyzing grip of powers utterly new and alien. I was conscious of rapid movement, and realized somehow that a guiding intelligence hovered near me. There seemed to be much movement within the room of the ship, but I could not see the beings which made that movement. Queer star formations shone beyond the small window. The dream became blurred; I seemed to be struggling from a bottomless abyss, through shadows of blackness and madness. Then I awoke.

Another terror holds me. After waking from the dream I noticed that the goblet was gone. Remembering the dust I had sprinkled around it, I inspected the area closely. Now I wish I hadn't. . . . Someone must have entered the chamber and made faint, outlandish designs in the lint. They can't be footprints. . . . I didn't look long, but they are beyond description. Did they, or he, come near me? I shudder at the thought.

Wait! I hear a sound at last! Can someone be coming to my rescue? God! for a glimpse of pure, wholesome daylight! The noise is coming from the walls, an insistent grating—the rasp of metal on metal. Ah! I see now! A huge space is being taken from the left-hand wall so that I can look out. . . . Where are the rescuers? I must stop writing and try the window.

LATER. I walked to that opening in the wall, but it was not a window. It was a door!—a door leading into another room so vast that the very sight took my breath away. It must have been two hundred yards long and half that wide, resembling my prison save that at the further end was a huge raised dais or pedestal.

Then, while standing there in dumb amazement, I heard a soft movement near me, and cried out in horror. Something *invisible* touched my arm, led me through that doorway and down the center of that great room. I must write the truth. The beings near me—all about me (I now knew instinctively that the chamber was full of surging creatures)—were of some color that my eyes could not see. That, to me, with a scientific mind, did not seem impossible, but it was infinitely terrifying. I should have been more horrified than I actually was, but the food they had given me must have dulled my sense of fear. But when I remembered those puzzling designs in the lint on the floor in that other room, I trembled and grew weak.

At last we—I could still feel that queer clutch on my arm and hear shuffling movements beside me—approached the large pedestal. Here a terrible awe of the unknown overcame me. The paw left my arm and the shambling sounds retreated. I stood alone in front of what was doubtless the leader or king of the invisible horde. I looked up—but saw only the shiny metal shaft and the flat, round table on top. The strange lights made me giddy; my brain seemed to be tortured with hot irons, and I cried out in agony.

Suddenly the ache lessened and I was impelled by some other mind than my own to move to one side. A faint metallic clanging came from the wall near the dais, and a section of the frosty wall instantly became transparent. I had long since ceased to be awed at the

mechanical wonders about me, so that this astonishing change from metal to glass (the terms are merely symbolical) did not alarm me unduly. I was forced toward the rectangular glassy surface, and found myself looking out upon a monstrous vista. Before and below me lay a huge metal city of towers, domes and queerly angled structures, all lit by that same yellow radiance. Looking up to find the source, I saw far above in the dim distance a shiny concave shell—stretching from horizon to horizon—which apparently protected the city from the rigors of either intense heat or cold. Through this far-away film I could glimpse the darkness of a great void. Huge spheres of light, resembling the small ones in my prison, hovered over the city, suspended in midair by some physical law unknown to mankind.

There was movement in that polished, symmetrically perfect metropolis, but only the movement of mechanical objects. I could not see that which I was half afraid of seeing—the dwellers themselves; for I was now certain that I should lose my mind entirely if such a hideous sight were ever thrust upon me. The sensation of foreboding evil mounted as I made out a large central court in the maze beneath me, in the very center of which crouched a tall round gray tower. This one edifice did not appear to be made of metal, but of stone; and in the curiously angled windows I had my first glimpse of shadow in this nightmare world. For some unaccountable reason, the very suggestion of shadow made me tremble with hear. This I could scarcely understand until I realized that if ever these monstrous entities stood in a shadow of any sort they would become, to me, visible. I cannot explain how I knew these things—perhaps the beings were able to force their unspoken thoughts upon me.

At that instant, feeling thousands of eyes upon me, I turned without any willing of my own and faced the tall dais. Once more my brains seemed to writhe and burn with icy fire. I screamed with pain and stumbled to the floor. Then merciful blackness engulfed me.

I came to my senses in the smaller room, on the rubber mat. God! I pray that I won't have to go through that ordeal another time. I was taken before their king, and I know that I was tried and judged and found wanting. . . .

Another noise. The door in the wall is opening again. Some object is being pushed through it. Great God! A long, metal cylinder! I've seen it *before*. . . . The one in my dream. Was it a dream? No! by Heaven, *it actually happened!*

The door in the ship is opening. Soon they will come after me. . . . They are still invisible. I must hurry; finish this. . . .

I see it all now. A trick—a monstrous, alien trick? Alien room. Of course I am not on the earth. But *where* am I? They brought me here—watched me . . . now where are they taking me? On to some new hell? I don't want to go near that gray tower . . . madness lurks there!

EVERYTHING is clear. I am a fool, a blundering idiot. Now I know how my experiments with telepathy touch on this horrid affair. I had devised a formula for a precious fluid that I took which created abnormal sensitivity to other brain waves. That's how I was able to read Fong Lee's mind. This fluid was my discovery . . . my ambition of a lifetime! Not content with experimenting on humanity, I wanted to go *beyond*. I took strong doses of the

stuff; tried to communicate with other worlds.

And I was successful! Yes, I spanned the void of cosmic space with thought waves—or rather I made my brain sensitive enough to receive outside thought emanations.

I contacted an alien intelligence on some remote planet—I do not even know which one. Enough that I had actually accomplished the impossible. My distant correspondents desired to come to my earth if I would show them the way; wanted to explore new territory. I am no mean astronomer. I directed them to the sphere inhabited by mankind. I remember that I went to my study to relax before the momentous occasion when outsiders would visit the earth. For it was but a matter of hours after I had given directions that I was to expect them. Then followed the devastating mental shock. They did not tell me they were going to take me when they returned to their world. I should have foreseen this move; been prepared. No wonder I was bewildered when I actually awakened on a strange planet—on *this* planet—*because I did not bring any of my serum to enable me to communicate with this alien intelligence.*

The human brain in its normal state cannot do it—will not. That's why—yes, the shock of their coming was too much. . . . A human brain is meant for earth. . . .

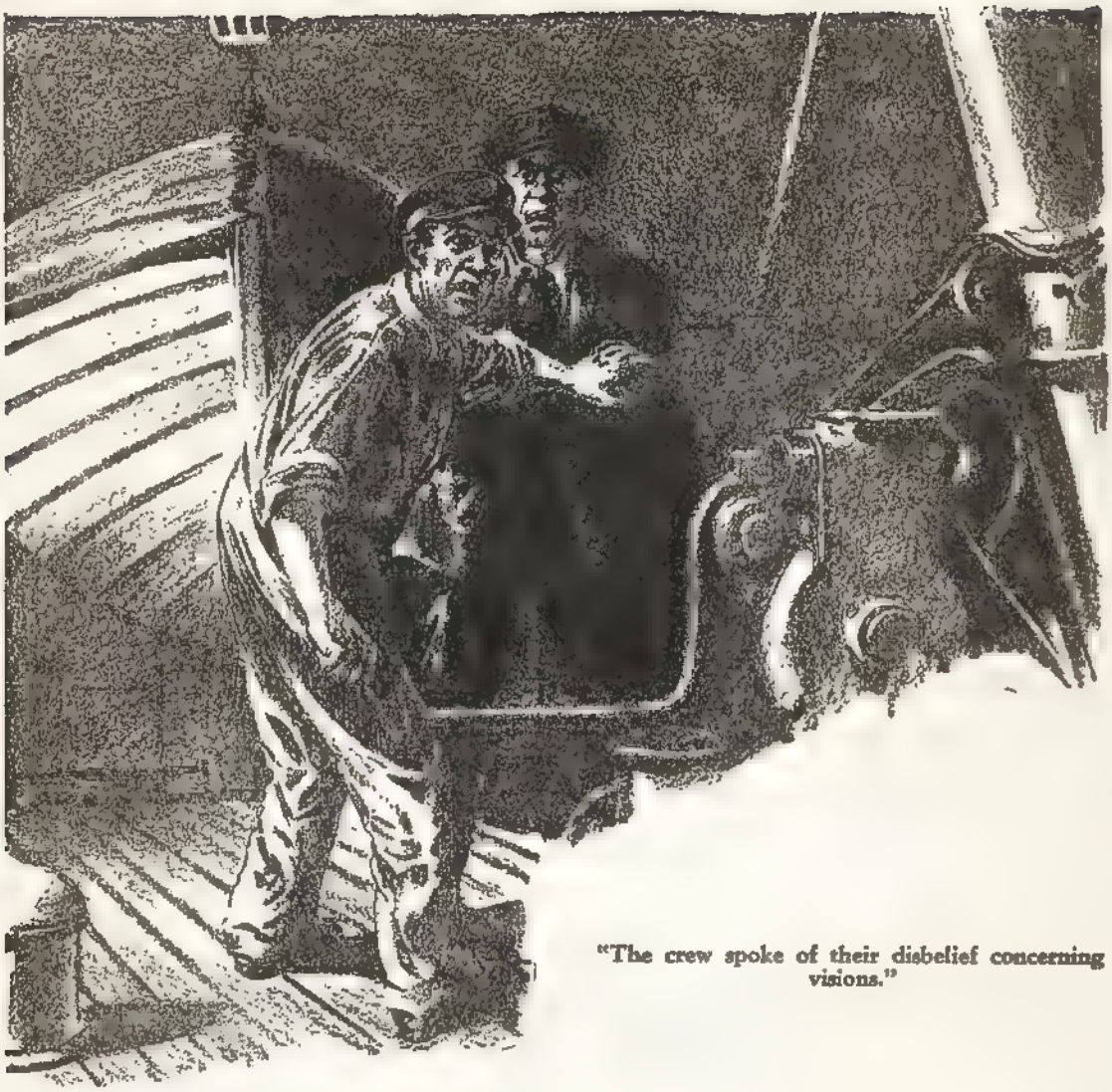
They are angry with me—I can sense it intuitively. Who can blame them? The chance no other human has ever been offered. . . . Only one way out. My pocket-knife. The blade is long enough. Should have done it before. . . . Got to hurry . . . will fold up this Ms.—put it in my pocket. If they take me back . . .

* * * * * *

I, THOMAS MELLON, Chief of Police of Hampdon, offer this manuscript for publication in an effort to explain the disappearance of one Herman Standby, the above-mentioned person in this rambling account. Nearly a month ago Standby's Chinese cook reported that during the night of March 21, 1936, he heard a loud disturbance near his employer's front lawn. Too frightened to investigate, Fong Lee said he awoke the next morning and found Standby gone; a great blasted and burnt area in front of the house. Upon investigation the following day, I found these statements to be true. No evidence has been uncovered to reveal the cause of this terrible scar on the earth.

Two weeks later Standby reappeared very mysteriously. How he returned without leaving traces of his whereabouts during the two weeks is a subject for speculation.

He was found near his front porch on the morning of April 6th, and according to the coroner, had been dead some twenty-four hours. Discovery of the body was made by a neighbor, who telephoned this office immediately. The cause of his death is not known for certain, but is believed to have been caused by severe nervous shock. His throat was scarred, as if he had at one time attempted suicide. The strange discoloration of Standby's flesh and the unusual position of his eyes indicating wild terror were not explained by the coroner. The above narrative, in loosely scrawled longhand, was found on Standby's clothing. Case closed.



"The crew spoke of their disbelief concerning visions."

The Swine of Aeaea

By CLIFFORD BALL

A bizarre and fantastic sea-tale about an island that was not charted on any map, and the strange doom that befell the sailors who landed there

THE waterfront dive was murky with layers of smoke and the vileness of its liquor was exceeded only by the language of the customers, a motley throng of sailors, bar-flies, and driftwood wreckage spewed from a hundred seaports. In Portuguese Joey's joint the color line

was no barrier to trade; here swarthy lascars rubbed shoulders with saffron-tinted, pantalooned yellow men, and I watched a gigantic Negro surreptitiously fingering the haft of his concealed knife as he contemplated slitting the throat of a bearded racial prodigy wearing rings in his ears. It was not exactly a place where you could sit down to a quiet game of checkers. Portuguese Joey, the proprietor, was already half drunk but still able to keep a speculative eye wandering over his staff of burly bartenders.

It was no fiesta, no gala occasion, but merely the ordinary evening one experiences at Joey's. The Portuguese did a good business with these wanderers of the seven seas, and sometimes they unwittingly aided in substantially increasing my own income, which I can assure you is meager enough. I am a writer; not a good one, but nevertheless one whose local description goes unquestioned even when I am depicting scenes in far-off wastes of lands or waters which I have never seen or expect to visit. I gather a chance word uttered over the cracked mahogany of Joey's bar, a few sentences exchanged with a stupefied sailor or inebriated wanderer of the deserts, and thus I may garner the nucleus of a plot which, by afterward consulting a thumbed encyclopedia, can be developed into a remunerative article or story. Many of the tales I hear are lies, of course, constructed during the bacchanalian revelry to impress a lady of the evening, but sometimes I encounter a leather-faced adventurer whose words bear the ring of truth; and though my mind may rebel at times as I listen, I must perforce acknowledge in my heart that I believe I am hearing actual occurrences which have not been born from the fumes of the grape. More civilized persons read these things later and laugh—when they have been set into the convenient sanity of printed type. They are temporarily amused by a crackpot writer and his opium-laden imagination. So they laugh. They are entertained; my publishers pay me.

I wonder if they would laugh so heartily if they could see, as I have, the clenched hands, the beaded brows above those world-ravaged faces, the wild eyes of a man whose mind is torn from the security of infrequent pleasures to dwell on some distant scene of stark horror. . . .

I believe one man in every thousand walking the earth today really believes there is a basis, a faint seed of truth, in every one of those old myths historians have handed down to us in their quaintly fashioned hieroglyphics, legends told from mouth to ear when the world was young and records were not so well kept. Crudely as we may interpret their meanings, fantastic as they may appear to the polished cosmopolite, I venture to accept or acknowledge a grain of truthfulness in most of the mythological legends. In the face of the fact that so many generations implicitly believed in the Minotaur, Medusa, and Jason of the Golden Fleece, I contend that they or their counterparts actually existed in some form or other during past ages.

I WAS cogitating in this manner as I lounged against the bar of the Portuguese's tavern, perhaps because some inner sense was questioning my integrity as a writer or perhaps because the whirling, smoke-laden atmosphere and the foul whisky I was sipping (to maintain character) was affecting my wits, when the Creole, returning from a brief rendezvous held in the upper regions of Joey's establishment,

touched my elbow and brought me back to consciousness of immediate surroundings.

"Drink?" she inquired, flashing white teeth in what was intended to be a provocative smile.

"No. Go 'way!" I did not have to hear her story; I have heard like ones a thousand times. Her descent into the inferno was written in her face.

Someone stumbled heavily into my short ribs from the left.

"Heigh!" exclaimed a husky voice. "You look like a likely lad, sailor! How about buying an old-timer a slug before he courses homeward? Just one, matey. I'm broke."

After the first glance I could perceive the truth of his statement. He was obviously penniless. His clothes, if but momentarily scrutinized, gave visible proof of his assertion; he probably possessed no home to set forth toward, for the cloth of his threadbare suit was grimy with the soot of alleys and the sandy earth of parkways. It begrimed his entire five feet and a half of height up to his ragged collar, and unless I was mistaken, extended onto the skin of his scrawny neck. A dilapidated and crumpled sailor's cap, its vizor torn and its form sadly askew, perched disconsolately on the peak of his gaunt, whisky-seamed, weather-beaten face. His bushy eyebrows almost met above a predatory, beaked nose evidently inflamed by liberal libations. A heavy lock of coal-black hair dangled between his eyes like a turned-about scalp-knot. It was his eyes, however, that assured me he was not yet entirely drunk; they were steady, undimmed, holding the alert intelligence expressed in the orbs of an animal.

"What about it, Mister?" he inquired, anxiously. "Just one?"

He had not imbibed too much to keep him from seeing, after his second glance, that in spite of my attire I was not really a sailor. His beady eyes dwelt on my fingernails, which were not split by the harsh toil of the open sea, and I saw that not even the grime I had so carefully smudged into their tips could deceive him. The "mister" warned me, too. I hesitated.

"*Cochon!* Sprite of the Devil!" It was mustached François, the burliest of Joey's gigantic waiters. From the opposite side of the bar he flicked a dirty, beer-sodden towel at my companion. "Get off! *Va!* Do not annoy the patrons, peeg!"

With a movement so swiftly executed that even I, probably the only sober person within a dozen feet, was too slow to halt it, my solicitor launched the upper part of his body across the bar, poised a tattered shoe on the slippery and precarious surface of its rail, and presented a wicked pocket-knife before François' Adam's apple.

Accustomed as he was to quick action, the Frenchman remained paralyzed by the suddenness of the man's motions.

The little man's voice was husky with the dregs of drink, but somehow it managed to take on a ringing resonance which had been manifestly absent in his begging.

"Ape! Apologize at once; d'ye hear? Call me 'dog' if you wish—but unless you can give me a suitable excuse for naming me a pig I'll slit your gullet from lee to starboard!"

The nearest individuals became suddenly aware of the tableau and turned to gape. François had been recognized as a strong and dangerous man; it was surmised among the throng habitually gathered before Joey's bar that he had

once been an Apache who had slain his share of victims. The sight of a scrawny, five-feet-five tramp seriously threatening the Frenchman's muscular frame astounded them. His attitude proclaimed that his intentions were sincere and the deadliness of his attack was obviously recorded by the concentrated stare François held upon the bright blade in such close proximity to his neck—so close, indeed, that the waiter's strained efforts to gaze upon its dangerous point caused him to appear cross-eyed.

Still, the man could not apologize. If he did so he would lose "face"—and probably his position as Joey's foremost settler of trouble between customers.

I decided to interfere.

"Buddy," I said, "climb down and forget it. We'll have a drink—a couple of 'em. And don't hack up this garçon. François is my friend, and a most efficient server of the wine" (the last in stumbling French).

François beamed above the glittering blade. His "face" was preserved. I think his life was saved also.

"Certainement!" he cried. "I am desolated, *monsieur!* To mistake a friend of yours for one of the—the other sort! A thousand pardons! I bow my head; it is most—most—ten thousand——"

"A thousand will do, frog," said the little man. He slid nimbly back to the floor and his knife magically disappeared into some recess in the rent garments. But I noticed he kept a vigilant eye on François, doubtlessly alert for the possible appearance of a dirk or bungstarter.

"A bottle of the red at a table," I ordered hastily. I had no wish to become involved in a physical dispute in Joey's, not only because of the dangerous aftermath but also because a fight might close to me forever this source of material which I so greatly relished. A minute later my new friend and I sat at a corner table where the sociable confusion of the center bar was noticeably diminished in our ears. He was grinning, companionableness written on his seamed face, across the scarred table-top.

"Name's Sam Mercer," he announced, quickly pouring a second glass of bubbles in the wake of the one he had downed before I had more than sipped at mine. "From Norfolk . . . but a long time ago. Lots of wind has spread my sails since then."

THE wine brightened him almost at once. His eyes took on a cunning gleam and he surveyed me more carefully.

"What's the racket, Mister? I can tell you don't belong here; I've eyes, I have!"

"They call me 'Brighty' here," I told him, desperately. "I come here often."

"What for?"

"Perhaps for the same reason as yours. You're trying to talk like a waterfront bum, but I'll bet that if you tried you could talk decent English!"

His eyes narrowed. "What makes you think that, Mister?"

"An instance. If you were really a type, you would have pronounced 'for' just now as either 'fur' or 'fer'. You forget yourself. That's only one."

I had to trust him, to take the chance of throwing myself upon his shrewd mercy; for to have the disreputable patrons of Joey's recognize me as an uptowner "on the slum" would have precipitated a catastrophe, perhaps bodily harm as well as the loss of my privileges of conversation with choice characters. I had never been detected

in my chosen rôle before and I was rather at a loss to find that such an apparently discredited personage as Mercer could unmask me. So I temporized.

"Listen," I said, in what I trusted was a confidential tone. "Keep your tones down and I'll buy you all the wine you want—or liquor."

He smacked his cracked lips and suggestively emptied the remainder of the bottle into his glass.

"You a dick?"

"No; a writer. Now be decent, will you, and keep it under your hat?"

"What d'ye want in a joint like this?"

"I find story material here."

"A pen-pusher, eh? Well, you're not a bad sort, at that, Mister. You don't have the dumb looks some of those pinch-nosed bags-o'-bones have, either. If you've the sense to keep your trap shut while I'm gassing and the pocket provisions to keep the wine flowing, I'll tell you a story that will raise your hair—it did mine. What d'ye say?"

"I would be interested, except that——"

"I don't tell it often because folks get to thinking maybe I'm a little touched. Maybe I am, come to think of it, and maybe you would be too if you had seen what I did. I hate to think of getting sober after the telling of it, too, for although it happened ten years or more ago I sometimes see that damned island as plain as if it were today! Want to hear?"

"As long as it's not the old Spanish prisoner gag or the 'come-on' gold-mine-pearls-or maharajah's rubies stuff. Go ahead."

"None of that. And you don't have to invest any dough beyond the price of the wine—unless it's worth the price of a night in the flop-house to you. I could spin a lot of tall yarns; I've heard plenty and made up a few of my own. But this is the truth, Mister; I saw it with my own eyes and I wish to God I hadn't. My memory is too good. . . .

WE WERE beating it down the coast from Athens [said Mercer] in a rusty tramp steamer with the usual crew of waterfront bums you find on those gipsy ships. You know, I guess, what a "tramp" is; sometimes she don't touch her home dock for five years or more—mostly more—because she will take on whatever cargo she can get at any forsaken port or hole in the river's bank and carry it to whatever other miserable spot she's paid to reach. When she gets too rusty the owners or the captain sink her for the insurance. Her name, if you are interested, was the *Maid of London* when I joined, but it wasn't for long; because at Athens, while we were unloading windmill machinery one of the cases broke open and dumped a sweet assortment of sub-Thompson machine guns right under the noses of the port authorities. We paid the grafters plenty to get clear. Out at sea we painted the letters blank and changed her name to the *Belle of Orleans,* under the orders of Captain Lewell. Then we beat it down the coast again before the grease-balls should change their minds and decide to bring us back.

Captain Lewell was a limey; one of the smartest Englishmen I ever knew, and a swell smuggler. He was almost able to convince the customs inspectors that an elephant was a weathered balloon bag. But he had an awful temper, and he beat up a couple of the boys the first day out because he was sore about losing the fighting-irons and having to pay through the nose for them besides. He was an old-time bucko. . . .

When the cook found the stowaway

hiding behind the canned goods he got mad first because the fellow had eaten some of the supplies, but he wasn't as sore as Captain Lewell. I was one of the men who took the fellow up to the captain's quarters, and I know.

I give the fellow credit; he wasn't scared. He didn't fight us, although we shoved him around pretty roughly, for at first we thought he might be a spy posted at our last port and up to no good. He wasn't Greek, but we wasn't sure what any man might decide to lend himself to in those days. The boys in France had been turned loose and three-quarters of them hadn't any jobs any more. The job they had been told was saving the world for democracy was over and quite a number of them didn't know what to take up next. Odd jobs were in line, even if it meant working for grease-balls. They had had a taste of excitement and were still hungry.

This guy had big, broad shoulders and a pair of knotty hands I took care to stay away from in case he did get mad. His skin was fair as a baby's and his long yellow hair blew all over his face as we were hustling him across the deck. He must have stood six-feet-five and he weighed accordingly. He dwarfed us all. Every pound of him was solid and he could have dragged that waterfront crew of beer-bellies around for a while before they mussed him up, but he laughed at us and came along without raising a fuss.

Old Lew, who limped and had only one finger left on his right hand but was fast enough to poke a man's eye out with it before the man could move, was in the lead and staring over his shoulder at the prisoner. I saw Lew was looking kind of funny, but then he was funny in the head at times, you know, and very superstitious. Pretty soon he dropped back to me and whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

"Sam," he said, "he's a Jonah! I wish we hadn't found him! He's bad luck, Sam!"

"Shark-bait, you mean, after the captain's seen him," I told him.

Old Lew shrugged. "Go look at his eyes," he said.

To humor the old fool I skipped ahead to where I could see the fellow's face.

The prisoner noticed me and grinned. "Hello, shrimp," he said.

I didn't answer, because I was seeing what Old Lew had intended me to see. One of the stowaway's eyes were a deep blue color, and the other, the left one, was brown! By the grace of the sea's unwritten log-book the old man was right! A man with two-colored eyes was bad luck. We don't laugh at these beliefs. I know they may sound funny to a landsman, but some of us old-timers have seen them come true too often to laugh any more.

THE captain was in an ugly mood, as I've said before, and when we knocked I think we interrupted his hourly whisky-and-soda, which was bad for all concerned. I heard glass rattling and a desk-drawer slam before he bellowed: "Yeah, what in thunder is it now?" We knew that now we could go in.

The captain didn't always talk like that. In port he used the common speech of an ordinary A. B. because he was always sober then and knew what he was saying. He had to know, meeting the tricky monkeys we dealt with, but once or twice when we were well at sea and he could afford to let down the barriers (something most captains can't, when at sea) he spieled off some mighty fine language, talking to him-

self in the manner some people use when they think they're alone and no one else less than a thousand miles away—or maybe like some of the derelict bums I've heard reciting poetry over a glass of some alcoholic beverage.

"A damned stowaway, eh!" he swore, after we had explained. He glared at the big blond fellow with bloodshot eyes and his tobacco-stained mustache bristled like a worn comb. I could see he was a little drunk. "Well, he can work in the cook's quarters or jump the rail—and I don't care which he chooses! Here's something to break him in."

With that, the captain lurched forward and, drunk as he was, swung one of those uppercuts for which he was famous. The stowaway moved his head an inch, so that the blow just glanced off his chin, but I knew his jaw would ache anyhow. Once I hadn't been fast enough to duck. . . .

"My name," said the blond fellow as calmly as if nothing had happened, "is Charles Brighton."

Just like that, as if he wasn't in a jam on one of the toughest tramps it has ever been my fortune to sail upon and before a whisky-mad limey ready to work out a grudge. He was a man, all right, this baby-face with the different-colored eyes, and my heart warmed for him, Jonah or no.

"What's in a name?" asked the captain, lurching back against his desk. Old Lew and I looked sideward at each other, for somehow the captain's voice had changed and become rather dignified, just as it always did when he talked to himself. I looked at the fellow who called himself Brighton and I saw that his eyes had narrowed; the smile was gone and he was staring at the captain sort of eagerly, like a man looking at a half-filled bottle he has just discovered he hadn't finished the night before.

"What's in a name?" repeated the captain.

Without any warning at all, this Brighton began to talk just like Captain Lewell, in the same queer singsong way. Here's what he said, Mister. I don't know why I remembered it, for I can't understand all it means, but it sounded beautiful then, like the temple bells at Canton. We were clinging to him, arm and arm, when he began:

"But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep."

Don't that sound swell, Mister? He even taught me how to pronounce those words. Like "fantastic." I watched him pretty close but I never caught him laughing at me. He seemed to enjoy showing me, in fact. He said it was Shakespeare.

But Captain Lewell, when he heard that, almost slid off his desk to the floor. He grabbed at the wall and his face was as white as death. When he spoke again he sort of choked and stammered.

"You—you're no bum!" he said to the stowaway. "You've been among decent people. You've been to——"

"Harvard," said Brighton.

"My God!" said the captain. "Sit down, will you? Sit here. Have a whisky-and-soda? Have a cigar—best Havanas, they are! Hey—you bilge rats! Get out of here! Get out!"

We got, not knowing what to say. Old Lew limped off muttering: "Jonah—as sure as you live!"

About fifteen minutes later the captain roared down from the upper deck:

"Mercer, you shrimp, get that weasel-faced rat that calls himself a cook to dish up a meal for Mr. Brighton. As fit a one as he can, d'ye hear?"

"Aye, sir!" I answered, stumbling toward the galley and wondering why, in the name of Buddha, a stowaway deserved the captain's food, liquor and cigars just because he could talk some outlandish poetry that made no sense. I took the meal up myself; I was as curious as an old maid.

THE captain had both elbows planted on the table he had dragged into the center of the room, the one he kept the old, shrieking phonograph on, and I saw the machine itself lying where he had thrown it in the corner of the room. Thrown it, mind you! And one day he had kicked Old Lew down a companionway just for reaching out to touch it! The captain had a big smile on his face. He had washed it, too. His hair (what was left) was combed. I could see he was sobering. He waved his hand for me to put the food Cooky had sworn over on the table. As soon as I did he pushed it in front of the stowaway with the air of a Continental waiter. His eyes never turned in my direction; they were fixed on the fellow Brighton as a dying sailor's are on Heaven.

"The best I have, Mr. Brighton," he said. "My apologies, but it's the best I have!"

"Mister" to a stowaway!

I lingered as long as I dared so as to hear what story the fellow would have to tell, wondering if he was going to protest honesty and bad luck, watching him sprawled there in the best chair the cabin afforded, and in spite of my prejudices I couldn't help but like his smile and the queer pair of eyes that seemed to go with it.

He said: "Thank you, Captain Lewell, I appreciate all of this no end, y'know! Most hospitable, you are, to treat a common, sneaking stowaway in this fashion!"

"Common? Fft!" exclaimed the captain. "It's twenty years since I talked to a gentleman, Mr. Brighton. Imagine—twenty years!"

I never saw the captain looking sad before; he had a poker-face that only changed when he got mad. Then he wanted to fight and I didn't dare look. But now he had a face like an heir whose uncle had forgotten to leave a will.

"As I was saying, Captain," said Brighton, flashing the smile, "I'm on a quest — perhaps an indefinite quest, y'know. But then I think sometimes the power of the mind can be utilized as a compass."

If "utilized" meant what I thought it did, then Brighton was plain crazy, I figured.

"Yes?" inquired Captain Lewell, encouragingly.

"This may sound strange to you," said the blond-head, "even idiotic. I'm searching for the Isle of Ææa."

"Ææa? Ææa?" repeated the other, wrinkling his forehead. "Never heard —no, that is . . . Look here, Mr. Brighton! You can't mean the mythical isle mentioned in the *Odyssey?* Not Ulysses' Island of Enchantment?, Not the goddess——"

"And Circe, the enchantress!" finished the stowaway.

"Are you pulling my leg?" inquired the captain, grinning. "I have not set my course for Ithaca, you see."

He certainly was standing for a lot of bosh, I thought.

"No, honestly, I'm not, Captain," said the fellow. "Here's the truth. I always was fascinated by Homer and

his contemporary writers, even in early childhood. I never had to work, as my friends did; the pater had too much to allow me. And things were boresome, y'know. Last year I got fed up with the old homestead, y'see, and I said to the governor: 'I'm off on a little trip.' He was so busy devising extra laws for a kingdom already overburdened with them that he paid little attention to me. Besides, I'm twenty-seven and I've always done as I pleased. He said: 'Right-O, take the yacht and some friends and enough chaperones. The last, at least, so you don't ruin my political career! Where are you bound?' I hadn't decided yet, so I told him: 'Maybe I'll search for the Holy Grail or form a new Crusade or discover the Isles of Enchantment.' He replied, laughingly, that perhaps I did not sustain enough morality to prolong a quest for the Holy Relic, but with a sufficient amount of bad luck I might discover a Circe."

HERE I, the chronicler, interrupted. "Look here, Mercer! Why is it that sometimes you speak a jargon, a combination of Limehouse and Bowery slang, and then with so little difficulty manage to produce an Etonian accent! You had to be taught to pronounce 'fantastic', yet terms such as the 'Crusades' or 'the Holy Grail' are no strangers to your tongue and slide so readily off of it. You didn't memorize everything Charles Brighton said, did you?"

"I told you, Mister, I have an awful good memory. I can remember back almost to the day I was born. A lot of those words meant nothing to me but I sort of remembered how they sounded, that's all. This wine isn't bad, is it?"

His was once more the last portion remaining in the bottle; because of the delicate intimation I hastily beckoned a waiter.

THEN [continued my narrator] the captain began to laugh. He laughed until his mustache bristled, slapped his palms on the table until the dishes danced a cachinnation, and even smiled at me.

"Ha! Ha!" he roared. "A good one, Mr. Brighton! Almost, for the moment, you had me believing *you* were crazy!"

Brighton kept on smiling. "I ditched the yacht, because y'see Circe might be somewhat astonished if I invaded her ancient premises with an engine-room full of Diesel machinery and a crew of sophisticates who would want to examine her gowns or compare her with Garbo, and grabbed a job, incognito, as an ordinary steward in the Green Line. If I would go into details it would surprise you—what I've seen. For instance: I saw your guns crashing out before those surprised blockheads back there on the dock. So I deserted my present ship and boarded yours dressed as a vagabond sailor while you were still arguing with the port officials. You looked interesting, and I have the money to pay for my passage. I can keep a still tongue in my head—you need have no worry——"

"Please, please, Mr. Brighton!" said the captain. "No mention of money between gentlemen! You are my guest."

I gasped, hearing *him* refuse money!

"After all, I have attained the latitudes of Circe and her barnyard swarms!" laughed this crazy blondhead, this vagabond adventurer.

"Practically among the swine on this ship—with the exception of their mistress!" snapped Captain Lewell. I realized he was glaring at me. Ab-

sorbed, he had not noticed my aimless pottering about as I listened to the conversation, but now I had in some way attracted his attention and I felt like a mouse seeking the safety of its private knothole as I fled toward the door. My exit was conspicuous, I'm afraid, because of the extreme necessity for flight.

"MR. MERCER [I interposed] the goodness of the wine apparently accentuates your eloquence. You *are* improving! I suggest that if you should drink enough you would become able to articulate with a fluency which might overwhelm multitudes!"

"Wine," said Sam Mercer, "is a wonderful achievement the gods must have invented prior to the birth of mankind. But you have reversed the deduction, my friend; it is the wine, not eloquence, which moves the multitude. Nevertheless, I shall not allow it to move me until I have concluded my contract with you."

I did not argue further; I was already more interested than Sheherazade's king.

FOR the next ten days we slid along like the Ancient Mariner wearing the albatross around his neck [said my newly acquired friend] and most of the time of Charles Brighton was spent in the captain's cabin, from which loud roars of appreciative mirth proclaimed the latter's enjoyment of the vagabond's wit. No doubt he was describing the "details" of his adventurous wanderings.

Brighton spent very little time in associating with the men, but during the few hours he did mingle with them he made remarkable progress with the riff-raff gathered from the seven seas, at it was represented on the *Belle of Orleans*. Because of his sojourns in the cabin they named him "the captain's pet." But the first day following his discovery as a stowaway he licked the muscular brigand we knew as "Big Turk," and the men began to comprehend that he was anything but a pet. Turk had been the bully of the forecastle. The second day he filched a bottle from the captain's own cabinet and shared it with all, including the Turk. After that the Turk announced he would, personally, tear limb from limb any man who chanced to defame his shipmate's name.

I have never, before or since those peaceful days, observed such a harmonious crew as the men sailing the *Belle of Orleans*, nor known of a man capable of mingling with both officers and seamen, and still retaining his friendliness with all classes, as Charles Brighton. He had the advantage of a brilliant flow of rhetoric which he was able to switch, at a moment's notice, into the polyglot slang of a dozen nations. And a careless, swashbuckling manner which his physique suggested was not entirely a poise.

The men rapidly cemented friendship. Only Old Lew hung aloof, refusing to share his wine and continually muttering of a Jonah. But then —Lew was touched.

So passed the next ten days. On the early dawn of the eleventh, one day out from our next destination, where we had intended discharging the remainder of our smuggled guns—the ones not discovered by the authorities—one of the watch cried out: "Breakers off the port bow!"

It's an alarming cry to hear at sea, Mister. It was especially amazing to us at the time, for we thought ourselves to be well out at sea and clear of any coast. The captain tumbled out

in his long underwear, swore, and insisted we were all madmen and there was no land for eighty miles except that straight down. But the faint sound of crashing waves coming across the waters hushed him. In the gray dawn of the approaching day we could barely distinguish a dark bulk that could mean only a rising shore, ringed by the inevitable white circles that denoted the presence of ragged breakers. Charts or no charts, latitudes to the contrary, we were very close to land.

When we dropped the anchor it fell into a short seven fathoms before it rested. The captain went back to swear at his charts. Anxiously we waited for more daylight. To me, the air appeared to carry a damp, offensive flavor, and I felt a weird tightening of my heartstrings. Call it what you will, premonition or instinct or the sixth sense so frequently experienced by the man accustomed to a dangerous existence, but the fact is that I guessed something was wrong with that island. It threatened my sub-conscious nerves. Once I thought I saw a giant, fan-shaped, white light rising from the center of that dark blotch on the ocean, like a searchlight aimed at Heaven, but when I excitedly pointed, it had already vanished and the crew spoke of their individual disbeliefs concerning "visions."

We had no way of determining our position or choosing a course. We were utterly, hopelessly lost on a strange shore! To move at all might mean colliding with a hidden reef or sinking our prow into a sandbank lying scant inches below the surface of the water. So we awaited light.

DAY came with a leaden sky, behind which the rising sun was totally invisible, and there was a light drizzle of discouraging rain. Fog drifted about us in ghostly layers which appeared to extend clutching fingers at the rail as if their concealing mists hid the corporeal bodies of lost souls seeking a fleshly habitation.

But as the sky brightened we were able to see the island. I can see it now, in spite of the whisky and the wine and the lapse of years, as plainly as I saw it on that accursed morn. It was unforgettable. By pure chance we had anchored directly off a narrow entrance in the surrounding reef through which, with luck, a boat would be able to pass; to the left and right extended an unbroken line of jagged rocks. The island itself, presumably about a mile or less in diameter, was unprepossessing. Heavy foliage, mostly undergrowth, grew almost to the ocean's edge, and there was but a few scant feet of sandy beach. The thickets were jungle-like in their density; even from a distance we could plainly see the interlaced boughs of stunted trees and the twisted tendrils of serpentine vines. Toward the center of this unusually flat island rose a slight elevation encircled by either a heavy clump of trees or what was perhaps much taller brush. The whole place exhibited not the least sign of a presence either animal or human, and the eery dark-green coloring was depressing to one's nerves.

The crew were superstitious, as all seamen are more or less, and several of them exclaimed about the noticeable absence of bird-life. One man said, paradoxically: "That blimey green color gives me the blues!"

I have heard of the different effects of color on the human nervous system; how red excites madness and blue produces despondency. I can't recall what green is supposed to do. But I tell you that solid quarter-mile of dark emerald

wall, rising like a silent but sentient oceanic creature above the leaden waters of the fog-wreathed sea, surpassed all the horrors described by Dante or hinted at by Doré. It held the threat of the unknown, of some bizarre evilness, and sometimes that is worse than actuality. If there had been one splash of some brighter tinge, one tiny patch of the rainbow-colored tropical flowers, to lessen the effect of the interminable sameness, perhaps the illusion we experienced would have been dispelled. There was not. Nothing was there except a great green blot, where, by all the findings of traveled seamen and nautical instruments, should have been only water.

I know Captain Lewell is sorry to this day for the orders he gave on that morning ten years ago. Perhaps his men are even sorrier because they obeyed. But you see, as I have already said, Hugh Lewell was a tyrant while at sea and they had a habit of fulfilling his commands.

"Lew," he said, "and—let's see—you, Turk, will go ashore and fill the water tanks. There must be water on an island as green as this one."

The two chosen did not object, although the utter silence of their shipmates was by the very fact of absolute quietness an unspoken argument against the captain's judgment. Those seamen were brave, tried men; vicious and unlawful in their deeds, perhaps, but nevertheless seasoned with the spice of danger, and so, cautious. They sensed danger on the island. Premonition, or whatever you call it, is an actual and acknowledged fact to the roving adventurer.

"Mr. Mate," continued Captain Lewell, "take the key to our arsenal from the second right-hand drawer of my desk and let Lew and Turk have a rifle apiece—revolvers also, if they want them. I doubt if firearms are necessary, for I can detect no signs of savages or wild beasts; however, we will remain on the safe side."

"Begging your pardon, Captain," said Old Lew. "They'll be no need for guns on that shore. Whatever lives on that piece of Hell won't be harmed by common lead!"

"You've been day-dreaming again, Lew," growled the captain. "Imagination getting you—or the fog. Don't be silly! Hop to it before I split your ears!"

"Aye, sir," said Old Lew.

But his face didn't change. I looked away. It's not nice to see a man you knew had nerve suddenly go to pieces before your eyes, and I thought Lew was on the verge of hysteria. He covered it, hiding the evidence of his glazed eyes and trembling hands as well as he could, and I had to admire him. Turk was too stupid to understand emotions.

Supplied with rifles, ammunition and the containers required for the transportation of water, Lew and the Turk rowed off through the fog wreaths; Lew with his mouth a grim, compressed line and Turk patently attempting to fold his beer-fattened features into a carefree expression. Both of those men were scared, but you could have cut the hearts out of either before they would have admitted it.

The island remained as silent, as brooding, as ever; I tried not to look at it but I might as well have attempted to ignore a tiger stalking me through the jungles of Cambodia. I had to watch those two puny figures (they did seem small from the distance as they beached their boat and pressed on toward the line of brush—even the Turk) and I could not help but think

that I, and I alone, was responsible for sending their souls into jeopardy, into the midst of the miasmatic evil exuding from that place.

"ONE moment, Mr. Mercer [I interrupted again]. "Do I understand you to say that *you* sent them? I thought you said Captain Lewell gave them their orders."

"Error of speech, Mister," replied Mercer. "I must be befuddled by the wine. And very good wine it is, too. Shall we have another bottle?"

"Your phraseology seems to have improved on account of it," I told him. "Of course we shall have another bottle. By all means. Perhaps, after I have had a glass or two, I may comprehend your dual personality."

"Is it your wish that I continue?" His tone was arrogant and I could see he was becoming drunk. "Do you care to hear the rest of my tale?"

"Naturally!" I was subdued.

OLD LEW and the Turk never came back [said my companion]. We waited for an hour, for two, for three, and still the green veil never stirred to reveal two men lugging water containers. The sun became faintly visible through dispelling fog. The men were whispering among themselves, and even the mate was tapping nervous fingertips on the rail. I was getting the jitters, myself, but I could not exhibit them, you see.

Brighton was standing very quietly by the rail and intent, I believe, on trying to pierce the fog with his assorted eyes. He offered no remarks to supplement those made by the overwrought sailors. He was, you understand, a gentleman, and although he tried hard to mingle in a friendly fashion with the men, his instincts interfered and he was unable to suppress inbred rules of conduct ordained by ancestors who had not been marauders. He might have been an adventurer but he never could have been a successful thief; it was a trait he could not repress any more than I can help raising this glass of wine.

Knowing him as I did, remembering his story of his family background, makes me raise another. . . .

Some of the crew began to cast evil glances in the direction of the patient Captain Lewell, who still stood immobile upon the bridge. It was not because they thought of blaming him for any misfortune which might have happened to Lew or Turk, but just an example of the inexplicable reasoning stupidity follows when in doubt or stress. They desired to place the blame of any mischance upon the broader shoulders of a superior. The captain detected their mutinous air and promptly asserted his authority. He was a man who could kill with his bare hands, a cruel leader of thieves, but it never has been said of him that he would send even the lowest member of his command where he would hesitate to go himself.

"Lower the second boat," he said. "I'll see what is wrong here. Another issue of weapons, please, Mr. Mate. Do you wish to accompany me, Mercer? You are at full liberty to decline, you know."

He was not drunk, so something must have stirred him to make him so polite.

"Aye, sir," I said. The captain's nerves were tense and I didn't dare to refuse.

Suddenly Charles Brighton was in front of us all, his blond hair waving with the beginning of an off-shore wind. "If you please, Captain, I would like to go also," he said. "I volunteer."

Captain Lewell laughed. When there was trouble at hand he became the sea-rover and forgot the gentlemanly manner. "Charles, you may wander the wide world over but I doubt if you'll find your Circe on an island such as this one."

"Well," said Brighton, "I'll look."

After we had easily surmounted the final wave leading into the opening of the reef we were able to beach gently enough. Brighton sprang carelessly into knee-deep water to pull the boat onto the sand. The boat used by Old Lew and the Turk was alongside and we could see the footprints they had made before entering the brush. Before we entered the labyrinth of the foliage I paused to look back at the *Belle of Orleans*. I could not help it; perhaps my companions thought I was showing weakness, but the fact is that I felt as if I was deserting a safe anchorage to drift upon a threatening coral reef. And I still remember the distant white blots that were the faces of the crew as they hung over the rail to watch our progress.

Brighton said: "That's queer shrubbery for these parts, isn't it?"

It was. I never saw such strangely shaped trees, with limbs that twisted like writhing snakes, or such oddly formed, three-cornered leaves as those growing on this island. Now that we were closer, things did not appear to be entirely green; there was a red network through some of the leaves, a patter of tiny lurid veins running wild at strange angles. No two of them seemed alike. The influence of the jungle odors which we now encountered must have affected me; for the thought came into my mind that the colors of the brush were continually changing, like some lizards I had seen that were readily able to merge their outlines and coloration with their surroundings. It gave me the creeps, I tell you.

LEW's and the Turk's footprints led us to a break in the green barrier. Brighton plunged ahead on a narrow path, and the captain and I could do nothing else but follow. The trail was narrow, barely a foot and a half in width, hedged by projecting limbs and trailing vines and covered above by the interlaced thickets so that it practically became a tunnel before we had advanced a dozen feet. The ground underfoot was soft and mushy, and the air curiously warm. Only at intervals did we sight the open sky. We saw sunlight now and then and knew the fog was gone.

"Look!" exclaimed Brighton, pointing at a spot some inches before him. "There are some kind of animals here!"

Something had previously crossed the trail, passing from one green wall to the other. It had left imprints on the marshy pathway, small footprints that might have belonged to a member of the cat family or maybe a fawn. On account of the ooze we could not tell definitely just what type of animal the spoor described, but I think all of us were secretly delighted to discover evidence of natural life on the weird island. I wonder still if the others felt like myself. It seemed to me I was traversing a pathway leading into some unknown land of the fourth dimension wherein the omnipotent powers granted to mankind would be unrecognized by whatever invisible shape happened to be the ruler.

I assure you, Mister, I am a very practical member of the *homo sapiens*, and this illusive sensation I experienced was not the result or after-effects of either drugs or drinks but the atmos-

phere of that damned island. And when I say "damned island" I am not swearing; that bit of rock and underbrush was damned in the sight of man and God.

The trail twisted and wound a devious pathway through rows of trees and hosts of sprawled vines. We walked through a dim twilight for what seemed an interminable length, considering the size of the island, before we reached a clearing. Perspiration stood out on our foreheads, and drops of sweat trickled into our eyes.

Just before we arrived at the spot where twilight once more became daylight and the tendrils and red-veined leaves reluctantly gave way to open space and fresher air, a small animal, perhaps a foot and a half in height, ran squealing across our path. It dived into the brush on the opposite side of the trail from which it had emerged and immediately became invisible. It was an ordinary pig of the razor-back type, dirty and covered with slime from its wallowings in the marsh's puddles and wild with fear because of its unusual encounter with strangers.

"I told you there would be life on this island!" exclaimed Brighton, triumphantly. "Somebody even keeps pigs. Or else they are wild ones. Did you see it?"

The question was silly. Of course we had seen it. Keyed up as we were, would we have missed seeing anything?

"Funny," I said, not meaning anything was funny at all. What I meant was that something was strange.

"What's funny?" inquired Brighton.

"That the pig should limp like Old Lew," I told him.

The three of us stared at the tracks left by the hog crossing the path. The left hind foot had been held high as the animal ran; we could see that only at intervals had it so much as scraped the ooze. I found myself remembering the wild stare it had given us.

"Are we crazy?" asked Brighton, thrusting out his double-barreled chin.

"I hope not," I said. "Time will tell."

I THINK all of us sighted the stone walls of the castle at the same instant. For the second time we stood transfixed with amazement. Erected there in the center of that muddy clearing, the Devil alone knows how long ago, on a remote isle which had no nautical authority to exist, the very act of discovering its grim and ancient battlements made one feel as the Connecticut Yankee must have felt when he saw King Arthur's court. My first impression was that the walls were very high, but they could not have been so tall, for then the trees would not conceal them and we could have seen their gray outlines from the deck of the ship.

I admit I retain but a hazy recollection of those stone ramparts. Remember, I was worried about the fate of Old Lew and the Turk, about the identity of the island which had appeared so mysteriously from the sea, and quite confused regarding the strange flora and fauna of the eery place.

As I have told you, the walls were gray with age and erosion. I am no geologist and I could not determine the composition of the rock. Perhaps at one time, in some forgotten era, the blocks of the castle had been black; I detected dark streaks here and there on surfaces less exposed to weather than others. A few withered and yellowed tendrils clung to their rugged sides, but the majority of the vines growing in the vicinity of the building had chosen

to creep toward the edge of the brush for possible support. The stones of the castle seemed to repel them. Brush ceased to grow on the ground surrounding the walls, although the dirt floor of the island distributed there appeared to be no different from that upon which we stood. A lowered, mediæval drawbridge crossed a narrow moat filled with slimy, greenish water, and the huge gates at the other end of its rusty length were swung wide open. The battlements above us were cracked and beyond hope of repair. We could not detect any signs of human occupancy behind the narrow apertures which extended along the wall.

I took a few steps in the direction of the castle, with a wary eye on the silent menace of that lowered drawbridge corroded with the moisture of centuries. Its chains were so rusted I doubt if it could have been raised. The water in the moat was fetid and obnoxious to the eye as well as the nostrils.

"See here," I said; "something happened to my two men to prevent them from returning or they would have done so by now; we all know that. Whatever occurred was probably connected with this lonely place, for it appears to be the only habitation on the island. Physically, the Turk would be difficult to overcome, and Old Lew is no babe in arms; so whatever ill luck they encountered must have been strong enough to conquer them before they could shout one 'hello' for rescue. I suggest you two remain at the edge of this brush, where one of you can retreat to summon help if anything happens, while I reconnoiter."

"YOUR two men?" I broke into his smooth flow of words again. "Had Captain Lewell placed you in charge?"

"All right, all right!" ejaculated my thirsty companion.

He poured another glass—for himself.

"I'm not Sam Mercer. I have tried to depict the scenes of this story through Mercer's eyes, but his dialect fails me. When I am sober I remember and become ashamed, for once I was Captain Hugh Lewell, in the service of His Royal Majesty, the King of England. I think you have guessed, and now I am drunk enough not to care if you know. Mercer was the third member of our party. I've taken his name in vain. Objectionable?"

I hastily reassured him.

THEY objected to my plans [said the man whom I had forced to reveal himself as Captain Lewell]. They argued that, while I was beyond a doubt in supreme command while on board the *Belle of Orleans,* I automatically lost my privileges when I set my feet on shore and therefore could expect no obedience. Therefore they would enter the castle with me. I retorted that I considered this expedition a landing-party over which any officer of the deck could assert the rights of leadership, and their attitudes constituted mutiny. Our bickering must have sounded ludicrous to any possible eavesdropper. We ignored the unseen danger which had swallowed Lew and the Turk to chatter at each other like a trio of African monkeys. There was something in the air of that accursed island that made fools out of men. I began to think of knocking Mercer down, although my heart told me he was just trying to be loyal, but somehow or other he appeared particularly annoying there in the dimness of the jungle path. I remember I thought of pushing his face

into the mud of the clearing, and I recall how the oppressive silence boiled in my veins and caused my heart to thump with the mad impulse of murder.

I fear I lost all official dignity. Hatred generated in that unholy air like cholera spreading on a plague ship. I saw hate in Brighton's eyes, and he was the best friend I had in two thousand miles.

When I decided to resume my lost authority by boldly walking into the silent castle doors alone and ignoring the petty argument, I found Mercer striding determinedly on my left and Brighton keeping in step on the right. We were parading, like silly schoolboys, in full range of any death-dealing weapon the invisible dwellers in that grim castle might have chosen to sight against us. Fools—all of us!

It was Mercer who saw her first and grabbed at my arm, almost throwing me off balance with the strength of his surprise.

"Look!" he growled. "In the name of—look!"

I saw the object of his startled surprise instantly, for I was on the alert. I cannot understand how he saw her first. She stood, or rather, leaned, against a stone of the giant doorway at the opposite end of the drawbridge. Her hands were empty and hung harmlessly at her sides, and she wore an air of mingled surprise and ingratiating welcome; evidently visitors were few and she was glad to receive us. Yet three grown men became immobile, wooden images when they saw her. For to see a woman, a beautiful woman such as she, costumed as she was—a white woman, mind you—on that remote island seemed incredible.

As if her arrival had summoned it, the sun broke through the fog and began to concentrate its fiery energy upon the already steaming jungle.

She was wearing a long blue gown that in some countries might have been mistaken for a nightdress. It was fastened about her slender waist with some kind of twisted cord, and tasseled loops hung on her left side down to her knee. The cloth descended to her ankles, which were invisible unless she walked. One could see her tiny toes protruding from beneath the immaculate gown, for they were encased in open-work sandals such as I have seen in Biblical pictures. To say her figure was perfect would be an imperfect description. It was superb. The smooth outlines of her slim thighs and the mounting curvatures of her full breasts beneath the clinging cloth were almost as plainly visible as if she had been nude. Not that I mean to emphasize her voluptuousness. I have seen many women, belonging to all races, colors and creeds, who could exhibit the same physical charms. But never in all my wandering over the surface of this globe, not even in the Latin countries, have I discovered a woman with such inner, smoldering fire as this one possessed.

Today I know why. It was her eyes. They burned with a submerged fire that might have been stolen from Vulcan after he pilfered it from Olympus. I can't tell you what color they were; they must have taken on all the tints of the rainbow, for one minute I thought them to be blue and the next I decided they were either gray or green. Another look, and I was prepared to swear her eyes were as yellow as a panther's. You can't describe the color of flame-tips; they keep changing too rapidly. The next best thing is to discover the source and look at the fuel. It was her eyes, not her features,

"The impressive silence boiled in his veins."

that registered the "here-I-am" invitation, yet the woman, or girl, owned an aura of virginal sweetness, and an observer would have decided she was a maiden who had never known a lover. To sum up my impression of her eyes I will say they suggested slumbering fires and cool, running waters. And that is a paradox, is it not?

HER hair was long, perhaps three or more feet in length, which was not customary at that time. She had arranged it to drape its strands over her shapely shoulders so that, at the first glance, it might appear to be carelessly hung. A thin circlet of some kind of white metal restrained the locks from dropping into her luminous eyes.

She was a picture of beauty an artist would rave over, I tell you. Perfect. Her cheeks were alabaster, her nose a Grecian perfection, her brow of intellectual height. I have seen throats like hers built on the stone columns of goddesses molded by the best sculptors this world has ever produced. Her lips parted as she watched us, and I saw the white evenness of perfectly formed teeth.

"Greetings," she said in a low voice. "You speak the English?"

Her accent was strange. I had never heard that peculiar intonation before. Brighton answered for us.

"Yes, of course. My name is Charles Brighton. This is Captain Lewell, who is in command of the ship *Belle of Orleans* which is anchored off-shore. And Samuel Mercer, one of the crew. Please don't be frightened; we are a peaceful lot."

She smiled, and I was aware of a tingling sensation at the nape of my neck.

"I am not frightened," she said, her tongue lingering over the syllables. "You are looking for—something?"

I looked at her and thought of

Buddha and the Sphinx and the careful carvings I once saw on a temple wall in Tibet. She impressed me that way —too much like a goddess to be of mortal flesh.

"Two of our crew came ashore in search of fresh water," explained Brighton. "They didn't come back. We found their footprints but we can't find *them*. Could you tell us if they reached here?"

The woman smiled. I thought her expression was mocking, but after I glanced at the features of my companions I decided to remain silent. You can't tell a worshipping sailor who has spent many days at sea that a woman who smiles at him is treacherous. It's an impossibility. You can't always guess at a woman's welcome, either. She may be happily receiving you or she may be a succuba; the more of them you meet the less you are certain. What I mean to say is that I was very much in doubt as to the intentions of this strangely attired woman.

"You haven't told us your name or the name of the island," said Brighton, employing a light manner and his most attractive smile. I could see he was enamored.

"The island," said the dream in white, still smiling, "is called Ææa."

I saw Brighton straighten as if he had received an electric shock.

"Ææa?" he repeated. "The Isle of the Enchantress? Perhaps then you would be—Circe?"

"Yes. You know of me?"

Charles Brighton stood there with his mouth hanging open.

"Don't be a fool, Brighton," I told him; then to the woman: "Madam, we are looking for water. Perhaps you can direct us to a spring? It may be that we shall find our missing men there."

"The only spring on the place is the one in my central courtyard," she replied. "It is quite a way back. The

Circe, the enchantress.

walls were practically built around it. Will you come in?"

Again I noticed the peculiar, halting manner with which she pronounced her words. One would have thought she had just learned the English language, although she did not exactly lisp her words in the manner of most foreigners or native women. I nudged Brighton with an elbow movement I hoped was unnoticed, but which I fear was not, for the face he turned to mine was a frowning one. You see, he did not possess the sixth sense owned by the wanderers of the seas and he did not feel the premonition of danger which I had become conscious of down to the marrow of my bones. Something was wrong, awfully wrong, on that island, and I knew it as well as I knew my mother's name.

"Don't you be a fool, Captain!" growled my stowaway. "Come on."

Mercer touched my arm, hesitatingly. "Captain," he said, "maybe I'd better go back for the water casks and tell the boys."

I was irritated by my own doubts, and because I comprehended the man's desire to return to the material safety of the ship his request angered me unreasonably. I grew sarcastic.

"Allow Mr. Brighton and myself to remain the fools of this party, Mercer!" I told him. "You can accompany us and imagine yourself a guardian angel."

Poor Sam Mercer never argued with me. His fate is heavy on the balance sheet of my soul. . . .

THE woman turned without speaking again, confident that her summons would be obeyed. We had a brief glimpse of an exquisitely shaped back as she floated before us into the shadows of the interior. She actually seemed to float. The lightness of her graceful carriage was uncanny. Brighton breathed deeply, like a spent swimmer, and placed his right foot on the threshold. When he saw Mercer and me by his side he entered. We followed.

The inside of the hallway made one feel as if he had suddenly stepped into another dimension; the gray shadows felt cool and soothing to skin scorched by the hot winds outside, and sunlight seemed to be a distant thing, half forgotten and associated with some experience of long ago—of very long ago. At intervals one could see spreading damp spots where the seepage of water issuing from behind the bare walls had, following natural gravitation, descended to the rocky floor of the twisting corridor. As we proceeded we passed several openings evidently leading into other passages extending at right angles from the one we were traversing. They appeared dark and forbidding, gruesome. Perhaps I owned too much imagination; I was younger then, you see, than I am now.

Brighton touched my forearm once and I saw his features were wrinkled by indecision. "Maybe it's true!" he muttered. "My God, Lewell—maybe it's true!"

"Maybe what's true?" I asked him rather savagely. I was still annoyed enough to provoke an argument at a time when I should have been using my senses.

"The legend of Circe!" he whispered. "The Isle of Ææa! The—the swine!"

"It's true that we are fools and you are our chief representative," I told him. "Has it been so long since you have looked upon a woman that she seems to be a myth when you see her? As an enchantress? Well, then efface yourself! When I see you again I may

be in the company of a Cyclops or a Scylla or a Charybdis. Or possibly I may return with my two missing men!"

"Captain," said Sam Mercer, "Captain, I don't think we'll ever see Old Lew or Turk again. Let's get out of here. Let's go, Captain!"

"Shut up, imbecile!" I commanded.

He said no more, but he continued to whimper deep in his throat. The man was afraid. Therefore I could not show fear myself; to do so would have endangered my rights as a leader. So I laughed aloud. Perhaps the secret doubts in my heart conveyed those discordant notes in my mirthless laughter which echoed and resounded through the narrow passageways, or maybe the maze of interlacing tunnels was accountable for the ghoulish reverberations flung back into our ears; but there was certainly no humor in their sounds, and I drew a deep breath to expel panic from my system. Men will not follow another man who is showing fear.

"Captain Lewell is amused at my poor abode," said the woman, without turning her head. "Please do not judge my home by its entrance. These are old passages built a very long time ago. I have more luxurious quarters which I reserve for my visitors. I will show them to you after we have seen if your men are at my spring. They may have entered the patio without attracting my notice. We will go there first—if you wish."

"Of course, Madam," I answered. "And I was not laughing at you, but at one of my men. Tell me—do you live here alone? Aren't you afraid of wandering sailors landing at your gates? Sometimes they can be—well, rude, to say the least. Don't they ever frighten you?"

I could not see her face, only the mass of lustrous hair hanging from the back of her regally held head as she drifted so lightly before us, but it seemed to me that she was smiling. I may have read it in some slight motion of her body; I can't say how I knew it, but I was certain she was amused at my questions.

"No, Captain," she replied, "I never become frightened. I find that the sailors always respect me. And I am glad to meet visitors, for they arrive so rarely. But then, I am not entirely—alone."

As she was speaking, a small pig darted from the depths of one of the adjacent passages and snorted its way through our group. It lurched against my leg, brushing filth across my trouser leg, and I kicked at it. It stopped and raised a belligerent snout at me, baring its teeth. For a minute I thought it was going to attack my shins as an angry dog might have done, for its eyes were eloquent with red rage such as I never before had observed in the optics of a stupid animal of its type.

"Geez!" exclaimed Mercer. "It acts as tough as the Turk! Must be a wild one."

I KEPT my eye on the beast but was aware the woman had turned and was looking at it, too. The next instant it was rambling crazily over the stones behind us toward some distant sty.

"You have queer household pets, Madam," I observed.

"As you may have noticed, Captain," she said, resuming her gliding progress, "there is very little wild life on my island. I make the best of what companionship I have—and sometimes the pigs seem almost human."

I heard Brighton draw a deep breath.

"Indeed!" I replied. "Yes, one ob-

"The worn images were laughing and gesticulating with queer movements."

serves curious resemblances to certain characteristics of man in even the lowest shapes of life. Would you happen to know, Madam, if one of your island pets—limps?"

"It may have injured a foot among the briars, poor thing!" she said. "Did you see it very far from the castle? I must look to it. You see, strange as they may seem to you, Captain, as my only companions I hold each and every one of them very—dear."

Wanderer of the earth's highways that I am, I have often visited ruins of many lands, such well-known sites as those upon which have been preserved the historic monuments of Spain, Italy, Greece and many others. I have looked upon Inca ruins and the lost temples of Africa about whose original builders no man can be certain. But when I attempt to describe the interior of the courtyard we three vagabonds entered on that woman's island, words fail me. The best I can do is to refer you to the tumbled obelisks of Stonehenge or the

poised images of Easter Island; for while looking at them I felt the same wondering chill enter my heart that I had experienced before the mysterious antiquity of those puzzles handed down by long-lost races to our day and age.

The whole floor of the inner courtyard was strewn with projecting rock formations which might once have been statues, but were now worn so smooth by the hands of Time and changing climates that they had lost all bold outlines a sculptor may have executed upon them. Chunks of shapeless stone, some formed groups oddly suggestive of women gossiping in the market place, or leaned toward one another as men engaged in desperate struggle. I selected one piece, in particular, which resembled a crucified man with his head thrown backward as he stared in hopeless pleading toward a silent sky. All were so worn that any carven facial contours some ancient artist may once have been proud of had been erased forever, and perhaps my impression

of lines defining corded muscles and rounded limbs was a fantasy of the brain alone. Placed as they were, in confused groups here, one lone pillar there, over the entire area of the flagging in the courtyard, they startled a man beholding them unexpectedly. Jason must have felt as we did, when he hurled the dragon's teeth onto the soil that sprouted armed men.

In the very center of this queer mixture of statuary a small fountain bubbled, offsetting the weirdness of the place by its enticing, gurgling, liquid noises. It was quite shallow and its depth extended to only a few inches below the level of the flagging; I imagined it was fed by some underground spring. The water was pellucid and obviously fresh, and even the blank features of the little, worn, stone girl whose form arose from the center of the pool did not impair my delight. Here, I thought, was a pure and fresh supply for the ship.

"How is it, Madam," I inquired, "that this island should have such a fair wealth in water and still remain unmarked on nautical charts? It's amazing!"

The woman stood on the other side of the fountain. She was, I remember, still exhibiting her enigmatical smile and burning the three of us with her fiery eyes. Her reply was not a direct answer to my query.

She said: "The water *is* amazing. Do you care to drink of it?"

I think it was just at this time that I realized although we were supposedly standing in an open courtyard I could see none of the sun's burning rays, none of the fiery gleams we had escaped after entering the castle. I looked upward into a gray atmosphere resembling fog, an inchoate wraith, a sentiency that hid the heavens from the puny forms of mankind. Like a blanket, it covered the ceiling of the courtyard as far as I could see, bridging their summits from lip to lip. I knew a storm when I saw one, with or without a barometer, and a typhoon also—and this was neither. I knew I was looking through, or at, a gateway leading into another sphere—a fourth dimension.

That is why I did not really drink. I merely pretended, placing my lips on the surface of the curiously bubbling liquid of the pool, without swallowing any of it. Mercer and Brighton were on each side, kneeling, and I could see their throats contracting and the little surface ripples about their mouths that testified to the extremity of their thirsts. But although my throat was dry and my tongue thick I did not drink. I got back on my feet, touching a hand to my barely moistened lips as if I had quaffed deeply.

SUDDENLY I was aware of a scent permeating the air, a fetid odor apparently rising from the water of the pool; it reminded me of the sulfur springs of Georgia, and the stench of it was offensive to my lungs, nostrils and eyes. I felt them streaming water —my eyes, I mean. An urge came upon me to sink down on the stones and slumber; a heavy lassitude was dwelling on my brain and my body. It could not have been the water, I thought drowsily, for I had hardly touched it. Could we all have been drugged by some clever ruse?

I felt myself swaying as though I was hanging to the plunging bridge of a ship in the midst of a hurricane. I tried to peer through closing eyes for my companions, but I could not see them, and the black mist was billowing down from the unholy roof above. It seemed to me that the tiny, girlish fig-

ure in the center of the fountain had altered; in my dimmed sight it had transformed itself into a merry, laughing, mocking nymph of classical beauty. I thought, during this strange interlude in time and sense, that it giggled and grimaced. But I could not concentrate my faculties entirely upon her restoration, for I had become startlingly aware of movement behind me. Dazed, I saw through the swirling mist that the statues on the other side of the pool were moving. The worn images seemed to have recovered whatever original forms they had once enjoyed; they, too, were laughing and gesticulating with queer movements. The whole courtyard was a fantastic scene, such as may have been drawn by imaginative artists depicting lost souls in Hell; for weaving appendages and leering features were flashing so rapidly before my eyes that only momentarily could I distinguish any individual form. And through all the maelstrom, the frenzied dancing, I saw the blazing eyes of the woman who called herself Circe. The fire hitherto slumbering in their depths had become a flaring volcano which penetrated the swirling fog; now I saw only her eyes and nothing of her beautifully shaped body.

I stuck out a hand into the gathering darkness, trying to reach Brighton. He had been beside me—but now he was gone! Through an engulfing blackness I pitched headlong onto the damp flags, never feeling the impact. I lost consciousness while falling. My last thought was that I must be drunk. But there was a small voice in my brain telling me I should not be intoxicated because I had breathed over a bubbling spring. Then came total blackness.

A tiny shaft of light touched my optic nerves and I opened my eyes to see from where it came. My first impression was that the murky clouds roofing the courtyard had entirely departed, before I saw they had but faded into a light, though surging and restless, gray. Next, I turned my head far enough to look toward the eroded images. My head was clearing, and I could see they were not wheeling or dancing in the mad orgy I had imagined, but as motionless as when I had first gazed upon them, weighted immobile by the crushing power of untold centuries.

A voice said: "Captain?" I sat up in spite of the devils hammering at my skull.

"You seem to have fainted because of the terrible heat, Captain," said the woman from some spot behind me. "Perhaps you would be relieved if you drank some water."

"Brighton! Mercer!" I called.

There was no answer except a snuffle I recognized as a grunt from one of her pets.

"They went back to the ship for aid," she said. "They said they would bring a stretcher, so as to move you comfortably."

I turned my head so that I could see her. The effort caused torture to my aching head; my neck, also, was very stiff. I saw her at once, poised as erect and looking as beautiful as ever, quite unlike the monstrous thing I had imagined while in my stupor. Her white robe was billowing about her body, swayed by some wandering draft; her lips were smiling, and I could not help but admire her wealth of curly hair. The crimson of her mouth revealed even, perfect teeth. The fire I thought to find in her eyes was but a sparkling, vivacious, cerulean blueness which enhanced her perfections.

"Why don't you drink, Captain?" she entreated me in a low, persuasive

tone. "You will feel better afterward."

I bent over the pool. Something else made a sound, like a snort or a grunt. With a supreme effort I was able to turn my shoulders far enough to see the source of this noise, straining my stiff neck tendons as I did so; I saw two of the bristled swine that were her pets, one at each of her sandaled feet, just duplicates of those I had encountered in the brush and in the corridor. One of them was nuzzling the hem of her gown, affectionately, and as I looked at it, it raised its snout and gazed directly at me.

The men on my ship were, naturally, watching for us. They tell me that I broke through the brush screaming, mad with fear and running as if head-hunters were pursuing me; that I did not emerge from the broken path but came running through the brush, half naked from the jagged briars. My face was terribly scratched. They tell me I did not even stop for the boat, but plunged into the water and began to swim toward the ship, still screaming, whereupon they set out to rescue me; that when they dragged my shuddering body aboard I was delirious, crying in the name of God and the Holy Mother that they leave the island at once. When they asked me about Old Lew, Turk, Mercer and Brighton, I replied that there were no men on the island—only beasts. I raved, they said, for days, lying in bed and drinking whisky. I shouted unintelligible descriptions of ghost islands, enchantress, black fogs, sulfur waters and swine.

They deserted the ship at our next port, every last mother's son of them. They told me I was stark crazy—and I guess they were right. I sold the *Belle of Orleans* for a song and drifted about on my own, sane once more, but afraid to sleep too deeply on account of the dreams. . . .

"THE bottle is empty, my friend," announced my companion, interrupting himself.

"So is my pocket," I told him. "And you get no credit at Portuguese Joey's. But I think you owe me a bit of an explanation. Your tale is, I grant you, interesting. But I can't understand just why you fled from the woman and her curious island in such unseemly haste. You awoke, you said, and saw her standing there, smiling. The fantastic hallucinations had departed from your sun-struck brain, she had sent your men back to the ship for medical, or other, assistance, and she tried to get you to drink water to clear your head. She did everything a lone woman could do to aid you. What else did you imagine to make you go insane, to tear through the brush, passing your men, and swim to the ship? Had you a second attack, another spell of unconsciousness? You know you left four men marooned on that isolated isle, don't you?"

"No! I left no men, I tell you!" swore the now thoroughly drunken man. His fist swept the wine-bottle to the floor as his shoulders sank to the smeared table-top. He relaxed into what was the beginning of a stupor. "I left no men!" he mumbled, less fiercely. "There were no men to leave. No men! I left only the swine!"

"What do you mean?" I insisted.

"Swine . . . all swine!" His eyes closed; he had almost forgotten my presence. "The pigs . . . at her skirts. Remember? Fawning like dogs. And one . . . looked at me and grunted. A gentleman pig, my friend! It's right eye was blue and its left was brown!"

Captain Hugh Lewell began to snore.

"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness . . ."

The House Where Time Stood Still

By SEABURY QUINN

An utterly strange tale is this, of a brilliant surgeon gone mad, and the weird mansion where he performed his fantastic experiments on living human beings—a tale of Jules de Grandin

THE February wind was holding carnival outside, wrenching at the window fastenings, whooping round the corners of the house, roaring bawdy chansons down the chimney flues. But we were comfortable enough, with the study curtains drawn, the lamps aglow and two

fresh oak logs upon the andirons taking up the blazing torch their dying predecessors flung them. Pleased with himself until his smugness irritated me, Jules de Grandin smiled down at the toe of his slim patent-leather pump, took a fresh sip of whisky-soda, and returned to the argument.

"But no, my friend," he told me, "medicine the art is necessarily at odds with medicine the science. As followers of Æsculapius and practitioners of the healing art we are concerned with individual cases, in alleviating suffering in the patient we attend. We regard him as a person, a complete and all-important entity. Our chief concern for the time being is to bring about his full recovery, or if that is not possible, to spare him pain as far as in our power lies, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Of course," I rejoined. "That's the function of the doctor——"

"*Mais non.* Your term is poorly chosen. That is the function of the physician, the healer, the practitioner of medicine as an art. The doctor, the learned savant, the experimenting scientist, has a larger field. He is unconcerned with man the individual, the *subspecies aeternitatis.* Him he cannot see for bones and cells and tissues where micro-organisms breed and multiply to be a menace to the species as a whole. He deals with large, great bodies like——"

"Sir Haddingway Ingraham an' Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sors," interrupted Nora McGinnis from the study entrance.

"Yes, *parbleu,* exactly like them!" de Grandin burst out laughing as the two six-footers hesitated at the doorway, unable to come through together, undecided which should take precedence.

"Regard, observe them, if you please, Friend Trowbridge!" he ordered as he looked at the big visitors. "*Quel type, mais quel type; morbleu, c'est incroyable!*"

To say that the big Briton and the even bigger Celt were of a common type seemed little less than fantastic. Ingraham—Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jamison Ingraham, known to all his friends familiarly as Hiji, as was typically an Englishman of the Empire Builder sort as could be found in literature or on the stage. So big that he was almost gigantic, his face was long and narrow, high-cheeked, almost saddle-leather tanned, with little splayed-out lines of sun-wrinkles about the outer corners of his eyes. His hair was iron-gray, center-parted, smooth as only brilliantine and careful brushing could make it, and by contrast his small military mustache was as black as the straight brows that framed his deep-set penetrating hazel eyes. His dinner clothes were cut and draped with such perfection that they might as well have borne the label Saville Row in letters half a foot in height; and in his martial bearing, his age and his complexion, you could read the record of his service to his king and country as if campaign ribbons had adorned his jacket: the Aisne, Neuve Chapelle, the second Marne, and after that the jungle or the veldt of British Africa, or maybe India. He was English as roast beef or Yorkshire pudding, but not the kind of Briton who could be at home in London or the Isles, or anywhere within a thousand miles of Nelson's monument, save for fleeting visits.

COSTELLO was a perfect contrast. Fair as the other was dark, he still retained his ruddy countenance and smooth, fresh Irish skin, although his once-red hair was almost white. If Hiji

was six feet in height the sergeant topped him by a full two inches; if the Englishman weighed fourteen stone the Celt outweighed him by a good ten pounds; if Ingraham's lean, brown, well-manicured hand could strike a blow to floor an ox, Costello's big, smooth-knuckled fist could stun a charging buffalo. His clothes were good material, but lacked elegance of cut and were plainly worn more for protective than for decorative purposes. Smooth-shaved, round-cheeked, he might have been an actor or a politician or, if his collar were reversed, a very wordly, very knowing, very Godly bishop, or a parish priest with long experience of the fallibility of human nature and the infinite compassion of the Lord.

Thus their dissidence. Amazingly, there was a subtle similarity. Each moved with positively tigerish grace that spoke of controlled power and almost limitless reserves of strength, and in the eyes of each there was that quality of seeing and appraising and recording everything they looked at, and of looking at everything within their range of vision without appearing to take note of anything. As usual, de Grandin was correct.

Each bore resemblance to the other, each was the perfect type of the born man-hunter, brave, shrewd, resourceful and implacable.

"But it is good to see you, *mes amis!*" de Grandin told them as he gave a hand to each and waved them to a seat beside the fire. "On such a night your company is like a breath of spring too long delayed. Me, I am delighted!"

"Revoltin' little hypocrite, ain't he?" Hiji turned to Costello, who nodded gloomy acquiesence.

"Comment? A hypocrite—I?" Amazement and quick-gathering wrath puckered the small Frenchman's face as if he tasted something unendurably sour. "How do you say——"

"Quite," Hiji cut in heavily. "Hypocrite's the word, and nothin' less. Pretendin' to be glad to see us, and not offerin' us a drink! On such a night, too. Disgustin' is the word for it."

"Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!" wailed de Grandin. "Oh, I am humiliated, I am desolated, I am——"

"Never mind expressions of embarrassment, you little devil. Pour that whisky; don't be sparin' o' your elbow!"

In a moment Scotch and soda bubbled in the glasses. Ice tinkled in Costello's. "None in mine, you blighted little thimblerigger; d'ye want to take up space reserved for whisky?" Hiji forbade when de Grandin would have dropped an ice-cube in his glass.

Refreshed, we faced each other in that silence of comradery which only men who have shared common perils know.

"And now, what brings you out on such a night?" de Grandin asked. "Smile and grin and play the innocent as you will, I am not to be imposed upon. I know you for the sybarites you are. Neither of you would thrust his great nose out of doors tonight unless compulsion forced him. Speak, thou great ungainly ones, thou hulking oafs, thou species of a pair of elephants. I wait your babbling confidences, but I do not wait with patience. Not I. My patience is as small as my thirst is great—and may I never see tomorrow's sunrise if I see it sober!"

HIJI drained his glass and held it out to be refilled. "It's about young Southerby," he answered gloomily. "The poisonous little scorpion's managed to get himself lost. He's disappeared; vanished."

"Ah? One is desolated at the news."

De Grandin leant back in his chair and grinned at Ingraham and Costello. "I am completely ravaged at intelligence of this one's disappearance, for since I have abandoned criminal investigation in all its phases, I can look upon the case objectively, and see how seriously it affects you. May I prescribe an anodyne?" he motioned toward the syphon and decanter.

"Drop it, you little imp o' Satan!" Ingraham replied gruffly. "This is serious business. Yesterday we had a matter of the greatest importance—and secrecy—to be transmitted to the embassy in Washington. There wasn't a king's messenger available, and we did not dare trust the papers to the post; so when young Southerby—dratted little idiot!—stepped in and told the Chief he'd do his Boy Scout's good deed by runnin' the dispatches down to Washington, they took him on. He's been knocking round the consulate a year and more, gettin' into everybody's hair, and the Chief thought it would be a holiday for the staff to get him out from under foot awhile. The little blighter does know how to drive a car, I'll say that for him; and he's made the trip to Washington so often that he knows the road as well as he knows Broadway. Twelve hours ought to do the trip and leave him time for meals to spare, but the little hellion seems to have rolled right off the earth. There ain't a trace o' hide or hair of him——"

"But surely, you need not concern yourself with it," de Grandin interrupted. "This is a matter for the police; the good Costello or the state constabulary, or the Federal agents."

"And the newspapers and the wireless, not to mention the cinema," broke in Hiji with a frown. "Costello's not here officially. As my friend he's volunteered to help me out. As a policeman he knows nothin' of the case. You'll appreciate my position when I tell you that these papers were so confidential that they're not supposed to exist at all, and we simply can't report Southerby's disappearance to the police, nor let it leak out that he's missin' or was carryin' anything to Washington. All the same, we've got to find those precious papers. The Chief made a bad blunder entrustin' 'em to such a scatterbrain, and if we don't get 'em back his head is goin' to fall. Maybe his won't be the only one——"

"You are involved, my friend?" De Grandin's small eyes widened with concern.

"In a way, yes. I should have knocked the little blighter silly the minute that he volunteered, or at least have told the Chief he wasn't to be trusted. As it was, I rather urged him to accept the offer."

"Then what do we wait for? Let us don our outdoor clothes and go to seek this missing young man. You he may elude, but I am Jules de Grandin; though he hide in the lowest workings of a mine, or scale the sky in a balloon——"

"Easy on, son," Hiji thrust a hand out to the little Frenchman. "There's nothin' much that we can do tonight."

"I've already done some gum-shoe wor-rk, sor," Costello volunteered. "We've traced 'im through th' Holland Tunnels an' through Newark an' th' Amboys and New Brunswick. Th' trail runs out just th' other side o' Cranberry. It wuz four o'clock when he left New York, an' a storm blew up about five, so he musta slowed down, for it wuz close to eight when he passed Cranberry, headed for Phillydelphia, an' "—he spread his hands—"there th' trail ends, sor, like as if he's vanished into thin air, as th' felly says."

De Grandin lit a cigarette and leant back in his chair, drumming soundlessly on the table where his glass stood, narrowing his eyes against the smoke as he stared fixedly at the farther wall.

"There was mingled rain and snow —sleet—on all the roads last night," he murmured. "The traffic is not heavy in the early evening, for pleasure cars have reached their destinations and the nightly motorcade of freight trucks does not start till sometime near eleven. He would have had a lonely, slippery, dangerous road to travel, this one. Has inquiry been made for wrecks?"

"That it has, sor. He couldn't 'a' had a blowout widout our knowin' of it. His car wuz a Renault sports model, about as inconspicuous as a ellyphunt on a Jersey road, an' that should make it a cinch to locate 'im. That's what's drivin' me nuts, too. If a young felly in a big red car can evaporate—howly Mither, I wonder now, could that have any bearin'——" He broke off suddenly, his blue eyes opened wide, a look almost of shocked amazement on his face.

"A very pleasant pastime that, my friend," de Grandin put in acidly as the big detective remained silent. "Will you not confide your cause for wonder to us? We might wish to wonder, also."

"Eh? O' course, sor." Costello shook his shoulders with a motion reminiscent of a dog emerging from the water "I wuz just wonderin'——"

"We gathered as much——"

"If sumpin else that's happened, recently, could have a bearin' on this case. Th' Missin' Persons Bureau has had lookouts posted several times widin th' past three months fer persons last seen just th' other side o' Cranberry—on th' Phillydelphia side, that is. O' course, you know how so many o' these disappearances is. Mostly they disappear because they wants to. But these wuz not th' sort o' cases ye'd think that of. A truck driver wuz th' first, a fine young felly wid a wife an' two kids; then a coupla college boys, an' a young gur-rl from New York named Perinchief. Th' divil a one of 'em had a reason for vamoosin', but they all did. Just got in their cars an' drove along th' road till they almost reached Cranberry, then—bingo! no one ever heard o' one of 'em again. It don't seem natural-like. Th' state police an' th' Middlesex authorities has searched for 'em, but th' devil a trace has been turned up. Nayther they nor their cars have been seen or heard from. D'ye think that mebbe there is sumpin more than coincidence here?"

"It may not be probable, but it is highly possible," de Grandin nodded. "As you say, when people disappear, it is often by their own volition, and that several persons should be missed in a short period may quite easily be coincidental. But when several people disappear in a particular locality, that is something else again.

"Is there not something we can do tonight?" he turned to Ingraham.

"No," the Englishman replied, "I don't believe there is. It's blacker than the inside of a cow out there, and we can't afford to attract attention lookin' for the little blighter with flashlights. Suppose we do a move tomorrow before dawn and see what we can pick up in the neighborhood where Southerby was last reported."

DAWN, a raw, cold February dawn well nigh as colorless and uninviting as a spoiled oyster, was seeping through the lowering storm clouds as we drove across the bridge at Perth Amboy and headed south toward Cran-

berry. Hiji and Costello occupied the rear seat; de Grandin rode beside me, chin buried in his greatcoat collar, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"See here," I asked him as an idea struck me, "d'ye suppose this lad has skipped? You heard Hiji say how valuable the papers he was carrying are, and apparently he begged to be allowed to carry them. These youngsters in the consular and diplomatic service usually live beyond their means, and sometimes they do queer things if they're tempted by a large amount of cash."

"I wish I could believe that," he returned, cowering lower in his seat. "It would have saved me the discomfort of emerging from a warm bed into a chill morning. But I know *les anglais*, my friend. They are often stupid, generally dull; socially they are insufferable in many cases, but when it comes to loyalty Gibraltar is less firm. Your English gentleman would as soon consider eating breakfast without marmalade as selling out his honor or running from an enemy or doing anything original. Yes."

A little light, but no sunshine, had strengthened in the sky when we drew up beside the roadway a half-mile beyond Cranberry. "All right," Hiji called as he dismounted; "we might as well start here and comb the terrain. We have a fairly good line on our bird up to this point, and—hullo, there's a prospect!"

He nodded toward a corduroyed Italian, obviously a laborer, who was trudging slowly up the road walking to the left and facing traffic, as pedestrians who hope to survive have to do on country highways.

"Com' esta?" de Grandin called. "You live near here?"

The young man drew his chin up from his tightly buttoned reefer and flashed a smile at him. *"Si, signor,"* he returned courteously, and raised a finger to his cap. "I live just there, me."

With a mittened hand he waved vaguely toward a patch of bottom land whence rose a cumulus of early-morning smoke.

"And you work long hours, one surmises?"

Again the young man smiled. *"Si,* all day I worka; mornin', night, all time——"

"So you walk home in darkness?"

A smile and nod confirmed his surmise.

"Sometimes the motors cause you trouble, make you jump back from the road, *hein?"*

"Not moch," the young Italian grinned. "In mornin' when I come to work they not yet come. At night when I come back they all 'ave gone away. But sometimes I 'ave to jomp queek. Las' night I 'ave to jomp away from a beega rad car——"

"I think we are upon the scent, my friends!" de Grandin whispered. Aloud: "How was that? Could he not see you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk 'e craz'," he answered. "Always I walka dees side a road, so I can see car come, but dees a one 'e come from other side, an' I almost bang me down. Come ver' fast, too, not look where he go. Down there"—again he waved a vague hand down the road—"'e run into da woods. I theenk 'e get hurt, maybe, bot I not go see. I ver' tired, me, and want for to get 'ome."

De Grandin pursed his lips and rummaged in his pocket for a coin. "You say the young man left the road and ran into the woods? Did you see his car?"

"Si, signor. Heef I don' see heem I not be 'ere now. Eet was a beega rad

car, lika dose we see in old contry, not small like dose we see 'ere."

"And where did this one leave the road?"

"You see dose talla tree down by de 'ill op dere?"

"Perfectly."

"'E go off road about a honnerd meters farther on."

"Thank you, my peerless one," the Frenchman smiled, as he handed the young man a half-dollar. "You have been most helpful." To us: "I think that we are on the trail at last."

"But I can't think that Southerby would have stopped to take a drink, much less get drunk," objected Ingraham, as we hastened toward the point the young Italian indicated. "He knew how devilishly important those things were——"

"Perhaps he was not drunk," the Frenchman cut in cryptically as we walked toward the little copse of evergreens which lay back from the road.

AN EARTH cart-track, deeply rutted with the winter rains, ran through the unkempt field which fringed the road and wound into the heart of the small wood lot, stopping at the edge of a creek which ran clattering between abrupt banks of yellow clay.

"Be gob," Costello looked down at the swirling ochre water, "if yer little friend ran inter this, he shure got one good duckin', Hiji."

"Eh bien, someone has run into it, and not so long ago," de Grandin answered, pointing to a double row of tire tracks. "Observe them, if you will. They run right down the bank, and there is nothing showing that the car was stopped or that its occupant alighted."

"By Jove, you're right, Frenchy," Ingraham admitted "See here"—he indicated a pair of notches in the bank —"here's where he went down. Last night's storm has almost washed 'em away, but there the tracks are. The blighted little fool! Wonder how deep it is?"

"That is easily determined," de Grandin drew his knife and began hacking down a sapling growing at the water's edge. "Now"—he probed experimentally—"one may surmise that —*morbleu!*"

"What is it?" we exclaimed in chorus.

"The depth, my friends. See, I have thrust this stick six feet beneath the surface, but I have not yet felt bottom. Let us see how it is here." He poked his staff into the stream some ten feet beyond his original soundings and began to switch it tentatively back and forth. "Ah, here the bottom is, I think —*non,* it is a log or—*mon Dieu,* attend me, *mes amis!*"

We clustered around him as he probed the turbulent yellow water. Slowly he angled with his pole, swishing it back and forth, now with, now against the rushing current, then twirled it between his hands as if to entangle something in the protruding stubs of the roughly hacked-off boughs.

"Ha!" he heaved quickly upward, and as the stick came clear we saw some dark, sodden object clinging to its tip, rising sluggishly to the surface for a moment, then breaking free and sinking slowly back again.

"You saw it?" he demanded.

"Yes," I answered, and despite myself I felt my breath come quicker. "It looked like a coat or something."

"Indubitably it was something," he agreed. "But what?"

"An old overcoat?" I hazarded, leaning over his shoulder to watch.

"Or undercoat," he replied, panting

with exertion as he fished and fished again for the elusive object. "Me, I think it was an—ah, here it is!" With a quick tug he brought up a large oblong length of checkered cloth and dragged it out upon the bank.

"Look at him, my Hiji," he commanded. "Do you recognize him?"

"I think I do," the Englishman responded gravely. "It's the tartan of the clan MacFergis. Southerby had some Scottish blood and claimed alliance with the clan. He used that tartan for a motor rug——"

"*Exactement.* Nor is that all, my friend. The minute I began exploring with this stick I knew it was not bottom that I touched. I could feel the outlines of some object, and feel something roll and give beneath my pressure every now and then. I am certain that a motor car lies hidden in this stream. What else is there we cannot surely say, but——"

"Why not make sure, sor?" Costello broke in. "We've found th' car, an' if young Misther Southerby is drownded there's nothin' to be hid. Why not git a tow-line an' drag whativer's in there out?"

"Your advice is excellent," de Grandin nodded. "Do you stay here and watch the spot, my sergeant. Hiji and I will go out to the road and see if we can hail a passing truck to drag whatever lies beneath that water out. Trowbridge, my friend, will you be kind enough to go to yonder house"—he pointed to a big building set among a knot of pines that crowned a hill which swept up from the road—"and ask them if they have a car and tow-line we may borrow?"

THE storm which had been threatening for hours burst with berserk fury as I plodded up the unkempt, winding road that scaled the hill on which the old house stood enshrouded in a knot of black-boughed pine trees writhing in the wind. The nearer I drew to the place the less inviting it appeared. At the turning of the driveway from which almost all the gravel had been washed long since, a giant evergreen bent wrestling with the gale, its great arms creaking, groaning, shaken but invincible against the storm. Rain lashed against the walls of weathered brick; heavy shutters swung and banged and crashed, wrenched loose from their turn-buckles by the fury of the wind; the blast tore at the vines that masked the house-front till they writhed and shuddered as in torment; even the shadowy glimmer of dim light glowing through the transom set above the door seemed less an invitation than a portent, as if warning me that something dark and stealthy moved behind the panels. I pulled my hat down farther on my brow and pushed the collar of my greatcoat higher up around my ears.

"Someone's up and stirring," I told myself aloud as I glanced up at the feeble glow above the door. "They can't very well refuse to help us." Thus for the bolstering of my morale. Actually, I was almost shaking with a sort of evil prescience, and wanted more than anything to turn and run until I reached the roadway where my friends were waiting.

"Come, man, don't be a blithering fool!" I bade myself, and seized the rusty iron knocker stapled to the weather-blasted door.

There was something reassuring in the shock of iron upon iron. Here was reality; just a commonplace old farmhouse, run down and ruinous, but natural and earthy. I struck the knocker twice more, making it sound sharply through the moaning wind and hissing

rain, waited for a moment, then struck again.

What sort of response I'd expected I had no accurate idea. From the ruinous appearance of the place I had surmised it had been used as a multiple dwelling, housing several families of day-laborers, perhaps a little colony of squatters washed up by the rising tide of unemployment which engulfed our centers of industry. Perhaps a family of discouraged farmer folk used a portion of it and closed off the rest. Had a Negro or Italian answered my impatient knock I should not have been startled, but when the door swung open and a tall man in semi-military uniform looked at me with polite inquiry I was fairly breathless with surprise. A liveried chauffeur opening the door of the old ruin seemed somehow as utterly incongruous as a Zulu chieftain donning dinner-clothes for tribal ceremonies.

His expression of inquiry deepened as I told my errand. It was not until I had exhausted five minutes in futile repetitions that I realized he understood no word I spoke.

"See here," I finally exclaimed, "if you don't understand English, is there anybody here who does? I'm in a hurry, and——"

"In-gliss?" he repeated, shaking his head doubtfully. "No In-gliss 'ere."

"No," I responded tartly, "and I don't suppose you've any Eskimos or Sioux here, either. I don't want an Englishman. I have one already, and a Frenchman and an Irishman, to boot. What I want is someone who can help me haul a motor car out of the brook. Understand? Motor car—sunk—brook—pull out!" I went through an elaborate pantomime of raising a submerged vehicle from the muddy little stream.

His sallow, rat-like countenance lit

up with a sudden gleam as I completed my dumb-show, and he motioned me to enter.

The door had seemed so old and weather-weakened that I'd feared my knocking might shake loose a panel, but it swung behind me with a solid bang, and the clicking of the lock that sounded as the portal closed struck a highly modern and efficient note.

Barely over the threshold, I came to a full stop. Something faintly irritating, like a swarm of small black ants, seemed crawling up my neck and on my scalp. Instinct, untrammeled and unverbalized, was giving warning: "Here is peril!" But reason scoffed at instinct: "What peril can there be in an old farmhouse burdened with decrepitude, almost on the verge of falling in upon itself?"

But as I stared about me I realized the look of desolation and decay was but a shell of camouflage about a wholly different condition. New the place might not have been, but its interior repair was perfect. The air was heavy, scented like the atmosphere that

permeates cathedrals after celebration of the Mass—the sharp and sweet, yet heavy, scent of incense borne from censers swung by priests.

The floor was brightly waxed and polished, the walls encrusted with a terra-cotta colored lacquer and, as church walls are embossed with stations of the Cross, were pitted with two rows of little niches framed in polished black wood. Before each framed recess there burned a little lamp, something like a sanctus light, which shed a wavering fulgent spot upon the image nested in the cavity. Each statuette was wrought in gleaming white stone, and though each differed from the others, all had one thing in common: they were uncompleted. Scarcely human, yet not exactly bestial, were the beings portrayed. Here a creature which seemed part ape, part man, was struggling with strained muscles to emerge from the rough ashlar from which the sculptor had but partly hewn it; there a female figure, perfect as to head and throat, seemed melting at the shoulders into a vague amorphousness as misshapen and unsymmetrical as the bloated body of an octopus shorn of tentacles, and hid her grief- and horror-stricken face behind an arm clipped off at the elbow. Here was a head as bald of crown as any shaven-pated mediæval monk, but with a face obscured by long and matted hair, waving wildly as a harpy's tresses whipped by tempest-winds. Beyond it was a niche in which a scarcely-started group of statuary rested. Vague and almost formless as a wisp of shifting cloud, it still showed outlines of a pair of figures, obviously masculine and feminine, as far as faces were concerned, but with bodies bulbous as the barrel of a squid, staring at each other with a look of surprised consternation, of terror mixed with loathing, as if each saw in the other a mirroring of his deformity, and abhorred his vis-à-vis as a reminder of his hideousness.

"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness . . ." the quotation flashed across my mind as I followed the tall man in livery down the hallway.

MY GUIDE rapped at a door set at the rear of the corridor, waited for a moment, then stood aside to let me enter. Facing me across a flat-topped desk sat a small, stoop-shouldered man, reading from a large book through a pair of Crookes'-lens spectacles.

"Doctor," my conductor introduced in perfect English, "this gentleman came knocking at our door a few moments ago, going through some most extraordinary antics and mumbling something about a motor car sunk in our brook."

I looked from one of them to the other in utter, stupefied amazement, but my astonishment increased tenfold at the seated man's reply. "Stravinsky," he said sternly, looking at me through the purplish-black of his thick glasses, "how dare you leave your quarters without permission? Go upstairs with Mishkin at once."

"I beg your pardon," I stammered, "my name's not Stravinsky. I'm Doctor Samuel Trowbridge of Harrisonville, and some friends of mine and I need help in raising a sunken motor car from the brook that runs between the highway and your place. If you'll be kind enough to tell your chauffeur to——"

"That will do," he broke in sharply. "We've heard all that before. Go to your room at once, or I shall have to order you into a strait-waistcoat again."

"See here," I began in a rage, "I don't know what this nonsense means, but if you think for one moment——"

My protest died half uttered. A pair of sinewy hands seized me by the elbows, drawing my arms sharply to my sides, a wide strap of woven webbing was thrown about my body like a lasso, pinioning both elbows, drawn tightly through a buckle and snapped into position. I was securely bound and helpless as ever captive was.

"Confound you!" I cried. "Take this devilish harness off me! What d'ye mean——"

Something smooth and soft and smothering, like a piece of wadded silk, was thrust against my face, shutting out the light, covering mouth and nose; a sickly-sweet, pungent odor assailed my nostrils, the floor seemed suddenly to heave and billow like a sea lashed by the wind, and I felt my knees give way beneath me slowly.

"FEELING better, now, Stravinsky" the suave, low voice of the round-shouldered man woke me from a troubled sleep.

I sat up, staring round me stupidly. I lay upon a narrow iron cot of the sort used in the free wards of hospitals, uncovered except for a thin cotton blanket. The bed stood in a little cubby-hole not more than six feet square, and was the only article of furniture in the apartment. A small window, heavily barred, let in a little light and a great quantity of cold air together with occasional spatterings of rain. Directly facing me was a stout wooden door made without panels but fitted with a barred wicket through which my captor looked at me with a rather gentle, pitying smile. Close behind him, grinning with what seemed to be sadistic malice, was the liveried man who'd let me in.

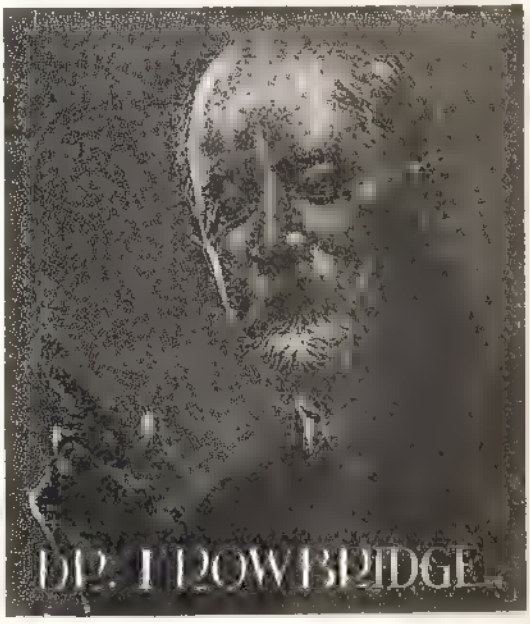
"You'll be sorry for this!" I threatened, leaping from the cot. "I don't know who you are, but you'll know who *I* am before you're done with me——"

"Oh, yes, I know perfectly who you are," he corrected in a gentle, soothing voice. "You are Abraham Stravinsky, sixty-five years old, once in business as a cotton converter but adjudged a lunatic by the orphans' court three weeks ago and placed in my care by your relatives. Poor fellow"—he turned sorrowfully to his companion—"he still thinks he's a physician, Mishkin. Sad case, isn't it?"

He regarded me again, and I thought I saw a glimmer of amusement in his solicitous expression as he asked: "Wouldn't you like some breakfast? You've been sleeping here since we had to use harsh measures day before yestreday. You must be hungry, now. A little toast, some eggs, a cup of coffee——"

"I'm not hungry," I cut in, "and you know I'm not Stravinsky. Let me out of here at once, or——"

"Now, isn't that too bad?" he asked, again addressing his companion. "He doesn't want his breakfast. Never mind, he will, in time." To me:



"The treatment we pursue in cases such as yours is an unique one, Stravinsky. It inhibits the administration of food, or even water, for considerable periods of time. Indeed, I often find it necessary to withhold nourishment indefinitely. Sometimes the patient succumbs under treatment, to be sure; but then his insanity is cured, and we can't have everything, can we? After all, Stravinsky, the mission of the sanitarium is to cure the disease from which the patient suffers, isn't it, Stravinsky?

"Make yourself comfortable, Stravinsky. Your trouble will be over in a little while. If it were only food you are required to forgo your period of waiting might be longer, but prohibition of water shortens it materially—Stravinsky."

The constant repetition of the name he'd forced upon me was like caustic rubbed in a raw wound. "Damn you," I screamed, as I dashed myself against the door, "my name's not Stravinsky, and you know it! You know it—you *know it!*"

"Dear, dear, Stravinsky," he reproved, smiling gently at my futile rage. "You mustn't overtax yourself. You can't last long if you permit yourself to fly into such frenzies. Of course, your name's Stravinsky. Isn't it, Mishkin?" He turned for confirmation to the other.

"Of course," his partner echoed. "Shall we look in on the others?"

They turned away, chuckling delightedly, and I heard their footsteps clatter down the bare floor toward the other end of the corridor on which my room faced.

In a few minutes I heard voices raised in heated argument, seemingly from a room almost directly underneath my cell. Then a door slammed and there came the sound of dully, rhythmically repeated blows, as if a strap were being struck across a bed's footboard. Finally, a wail, hopeless and agonized as if wrung from tortured flesh against the protest of an undefeated spirit: "Yes, yes, anything—*anything!*"

The commotion ceased abruptly, and in a little while I heard the clack of boot heels as they went upon their rounds.

THE hours passed like eons clipped from hell's eternity. There was absolutely no way to amuse myself, for the room—cell would be a better term for it—contained no furniture except the bed. The window, unglazed, small and high-set, faced an L of the house; so there was neither sky nor scenery to be looked at, and the February wind drove gusts of gelid rain into the place until I cowered in the corner to escape its chilling wetness as though it were a live, malignant thing. I had been stripped to shirt and trousers, even shoes and stockings taken from me, and in a little while my teeth were chattering with cold. The anesthetic they had used to render me unconscious still stung the mucous membranes of my mouth and nose, and my tongue was roughened by a searing thirst. I wrenched a metal button from my trousers, thrust it in my mouth and sucked at it, gaining some slight measure of relief, and so, huddled in the sleazy blanket, shivering with cold and almost mad with thirst, I huddled on the bed for hour after endless hour till I finally fell into a doze.

How long I crouched there trembling I have no idea, nor could I guess how long I'd slept when a hand fell on my shoulder and a light flashed blindingly into my face.

"Get up!" I recognized the voice

as coming from the man called Mishkin, and as I struggled to a sitting posture, still blinking from the powerful flashlight's glare, I felt a broad web strap, similar to the one with which I had at first been pinioned, dropped deftly on my arms and drawn taut with a jerk.

"Come," my jailer seized the loose end of my bond and half dragged, half led me from my cell, down the stairs and through a lower hall until we paused before a door which had been lacquered brilliant red. He thrust the panels back with one hand, seized me by the shoulder with the other, and shoved me through the opening so violently that, bound as I was, I almost sprawled upon my face.

The apartment into which I stumbled was in strong contrast to the cell in which I'd lain. It was a large room, dimly lighted and luxurious. The walls were gumwood, unvarnished but rubbed down with oil until their surface gleamed like satin. The floor of polished yellow pine was scattered with bright Cossack rugs, barbarian with primary colors. A sofa and deep easy-chairs were done in brick-red crushed leather. A log fire blazed and hissed beneath the gumwood over-mantel and the blood-orange of its light washed out across the varnished floor and ebbed and flowed like rising and receding wavelets on the dark-red walls. A parchment-shaded lamp was on the table at the center of the room, making it a sort of island in the shadows, and by its light I looked into the face of the presiding genius of this house of mystery.

He had taken off his dark-lensed glasses, and I saw his eyes full on me. As I met their level, changeless stare I felt as if the last attachments of my viscera had broken. Everything inside me had come loose, and I was weak to sickness with swift-flooding, nameless terror.

In a lifetime's practise as physician one sees many kinds of eyes, eyes of health and eyes diseased, the heaven-lighted eyes of the young mother with her first-born at her breast, the vacant eye of fever, the stricken eye of one with sure foreknowledge of impending death upon him, the criminal's eye, the idiot's lack-luster eye, the blazing eye of madness. But never had I seen a pair of eyes like these in a human face. Beast's eyes they were, unwinking, topaz, gleaming, the kind of eye you see in a house cat's round, smug face, or staring at you speculatively through the bars that barricade the carnivores' dens at the zoo. As I looked, fascinated, in these bestial eyes set so incongruously in a human countenance, I felt —I knew—that there was nothing this man would not do if he were minded to it. There was nothing in those yellow, ebony-pupiled eyes to which one could appeal; no plea addressed to pity, decency or morals would affect the owner of these eyes; he was as callous to such things as is the cat that plays so cunningly and gently with a ball one moment, and pounces on a hapless bird or mouse so savagely the next. Feline ferocity, and feline fickleness, looked at me from those round, bright, yellow eyes.

"Forgive the lack of light, please, Doctor Trowbridge," he begged in his soft, almost purring voice. "The fact is I am sensitive to it, highly photophobic. That has its compensations, though," he added with a smile. "I am also noctiloptic and have a supernormal acuity of vision in darkness, like a cat—or a tiger."

As he spoke he snapped the switch of the desk lamp, plunging the apart-

ment into shadow relieved only by the variable fire-glow. Abruptly as a pair of miniature motor lights switched on, the twin disks of his eyes glowed at me through the dimness with a shining phosphorescent gleam of green.

"That is why I wear the Crookes'-lensed glasses in the daytime," he added with an almost soundless laugh. "You won't mind if we continue in the darkness for a little while." The vivid glow of his eyes seemed to brighten as he spoke, and I felt fresh chills of horror ripple up my spine.

SILENCE fell, and lengthened. Somewhere in the darkness at my back a clock ticked slowly, measuring off the seconds, minutes. . . . I caught myself remembering a passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

"O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
. . . and Faustus must be damn'd!"

The shadowed room seemed full to overflowing with manifested, personalized evil as the magician's cell had been that night so long ago in Wurtemberg when Mephistopheles appeared to drag his screaming soul to everlasting torment. Had the floor opened at my feet and the red reflection of the infernal pit shone on us, I do not think I should have been surprised.

I almost screamed when he spoke. "Do you remember—have you heard of—Friedrich Friedrichsohn, Doctor Trowbridge?"

The name evoked no memories. "No," I answered.

"You lie. Everyone—even you half-trained American physicians—knows of the great Friedrichsohn!"

His taunt stung a mnemonic chord. Dimly, but with increasing clarity, recollection came. Friedrich Friedrichsohn, brilliant anatomist, authority on organic evolution . . . colonel-surgeon in the army which Franz Josef sent to meet its doom on the Piave . . . shell-shocked . . . invalided home to take charge of a hospital at Innsbruck—now memory came in a swift gush. The doctors in Vienna didn't talk about it, only whispered rumors went the rounds of schools and clinics, but the fragmentary stories told about the work they'd found him at, matching bits of shattered bodies, grafting amputated limbs from some to others' blood-fresh amputation-wounds, making monsters hideous as Hindoo idols or the dreadful thing that Frankenstein concocted out of sweepings from dissecting-rooms. . . . "He died in an insane asylum at Korneusburg," I replied.

"Wrong! Wrong as your diagnoses are in most instances, *mein lieber Doktor*. I am Friedrich Friedrichsohn, and I am very far from dead. They had many things to think of when the empire fell to pieces, and they forgot me. I did not find it difficult to leave the prison where they'd penned me like a beast, nor have I found it difficult to impose on your credulous authorities. I am duly licensed by your state board as a doctor. A few forged documents were all I needed to secure my permit. I am also the proprietor of a duly licensed sanitarium for the treatment of the insane. I have even taken a few patients. Abraham Stravinsky, suffering from dementia præcox is—was—one of them. He died shortly after you arrived, but his family have not yet been notified. They will be in due course, and you—but let us save that for a later time.

"The work in which I was engaged when I was interrupted was most fascinating, Doctor. Until you try it you cannot imagine how many utterly de-

lightful and surprising combinations can be made from the comparatively few parts offered by the human body. I have continued my researches here, and while some of my experiments have unfortunately failed, I have succeeded almost past my expectations in some others. I should like to show you them before—I'm sure you'll find them interesting, Doctor."

"You're mad!" I gasped, struggling at the strap that bound my arms.

I could feel him smiling at me through the dark. "So I have been told. I'm not mad, really, but the general belief in my insanity has its compensations. For example, if through some deplorable occurrence now unforeseen I should be interrupted at my work here, your ignorant police might not feel I was justified in all I've done. The fact that certain subjects have unfortunately expired in the process of being remodeled by me might be considered grounds for prosecuting me for murder. That is where the entirely erroneous belief that I am mad would have advantages. Restrained I might be, but in a hospital, not a tomb. I have never found it difficult to escape from hospitals. After a few months' rest I should escape again if I were ever apprehended. Is not that an advantage? How many so-called sane men have *carte blanche* to do exactly as they please, to kill as many people as they choose, and in such manner as seems most amusing, knowing all the while they are immune to the electric chair or the gallows? I am literally above the law, *mein lieber kollege.*

"Mishkin," he ordered the attendant who stood at my elbow, "go tell Pedro we should like some music while we make our tour of inspection.

"Mishkin was confined with me at Korneusburg," he explained, as the clatter of the other's boot heels died away beyond the door. "When I left there I brought him with me. They said he was a homicidal maniac, but I have cured his mania—as much as I desired. He is a faithful servant and quite an efficient helper, Doctor Trowbridge. In other circumstances I might find it difficult to handle him, but his work with me provides sufficient outlets for his—shall we call it eccentricity? Between experiments he is as tractable as a well-trained beast. Of course, he has to be reminded that the whip is always handy—but that is the technique of good beast-training, *nicht wahr?*

"Ah, our accompaniment has commenced. Shall we go?"

Seizing the end of my tether, he assisted me to rise, held the door for me, and led me out into the hall.

SOMEWHERE upstairs a violin was playing softly, *Di Provenza il Mar,* from *Traviata.* Its plaintive notes were fairly liquid with nostalgic longing:

> From land and wave of dear Provence
> What hath caused thy heart to roam?
> From the love that met thee there,
> From thy father and thy home? . . .

"He plays well, *nicht wahr?*" Friedrichsohn's soft voice whispered. "Music must have been instinctive with him, otherwise he would not remember—but I forget, you do not know about him, do you?" In the darkness of the corridor his glowing eyes burned into mine.

"Do you remember Viki Boehm, *Herr Doktor?*"

"The Viennese coloratura? Yes. She and her husband Pedro Attavanta were lost when the *Oro Castle* burned——"

His almost silent laughter stopped me. "Lost, *lieber kollege,* but not as you suppose. They are both here be-

neath this roof, guests of their loving *landsmann*. Oh, they are both well, I assure you; you need have no fears on that score. All my skill and science are completely at their service, night and day. I would not have one of them die for anything!"

We had halted at a narrow lacquered door with a small design like a coronet stenciled on it. In the dim light of a small lamp set high against the wall I saw his face, studious, arrogant, unsmiling. Then a frigid grimace, the mere parody of a smile, congealed upon his lips.

"When I was at the university before the war"—his voice had the hard brittleness of an icicle—"I did Viki Boehm the honor to fall in love with her. I, the foremost scientist of my time, greater in my day than Darwin and Galileo in theirs, offered her my hand and name; she might have shared some measure of my fame. But she refused. Can you imagine it? She rebuffed my condescension! When I told her of the things I had accomplished, using animals for subjects, and of what I knew I could do later when the war put human subjects in my hands, she shrank from me in horror. She had no scientific vision. She was so naïve she thought the only office of the doctor was to treat the sick and heal the injured. She could not vision the long vistas of pure science, learning and experimenting for their own sakes. For all her winsomeness and beauty she was nothing but a woman. *Pfui!*" He spat the exclamation of contempt at me. Then:

"Ah, but she was beautiful! As lovely as the sunrise after rain, sweet as springtime in the Tyrol, fragile as a——"

"I have seen her," I cut in. "I heard her sing."

"So? You shall see her once again, *Herr Doktor*. You shall look at her and hear her voice. You recall her fragile loveliness, the contours of her arms, her slender waist, her perfect bosom—see!"

He snatched the handle of the door and wrenched it open. Behind the first door was a second, formed of upright bars like those of a jail cell, and behind that was a little cubicle not more than six feet square. A light flashed on as he shoved back the door, and by its glow I saw the place was lined with mirrors, looking-glasses on the walls and ceiling, bright-lacquered composition on the floor; so that from every angle shone reflections, multiplied in endless vistas, of the monstrous thing that squatted in the center of the cell.

In general outline it was like one of those child's toys called a humpty-dumpty, a weighted pear-shaped figure which no matter how it may be laid springs upright automatically. It was some three feet high and more than that in girth, wrinkled, edematous, knobbed and bloated like a toad, with a hide like that of a rhinoceros. If it had feet or legs they were invisible; near its upper end two arm-like stubs extended, but they bore no resemblance to human pectoral limbs. Of human contours it had no trace; rather, it was like a toad enlarged five hundred times, denuded of its rear limbs and—fitted with a human face!

Above the pachydermous mass of shapelessness there poised a visage, a human countenance, a woman's features, finely chiseled, delicate, exquisite in every line and contour with a loveliness so ethereal and unearthly that she seemed more like a fairy being than a woman made of flesh and blood and bone. The cheeks were delicately petal-like, the lips were full and sensitive,

the eyes deep blue, the long, fair hair which swept down in a cloven tide of brightness rippled with a charming natural wave. Matched by a body of ethereal charm the face would have been lovely as a poet's dream; attached to that huge tumorous mass of bloated horror it was a thousand times more shocking than if it too had been deformed past resemblance to humanity.

The creature seemed incapable of voluntary locomotion, but it was faced toward us, and as we looked at it, it threw its lovely head back with a sort of slow contortion such as might be made by a half-frozen snake. There was neither horror nor hatred, not even reproach, in the deep-blue eyes that looked at Friedrichsohn. There was instead, it seemed to me, a look of awful resignation, of sorrow which had burned itself to ashes and now could burn no more, of patience which endures past all endurance and now waits calmly for whatever is to be, knowing that the worst is past and nothing which can come can match that which is already accomplished.

"Her case was relatively simple," I heard Friedrichsohn whisper. "Mishkin and I were cruising in a motorboat offshore when the *Oro Castle* burned. We picked her and her husband up, gave them a little drink which rendered them unconscious and brought them here. She gave us very little trouble. First we immobilized her by amputating both legs at the hip; then, in order to make sure that she would not destroy herself or mar her beauty, I took off both arms midway between shoulder and elbow. That left a lovely torso and an even lovelier face to work with.

"YOU'RE wondering about her beautifully swollen trunk? Nothing could be simpler, *herr kollege*. Artificially induced elephantiasis resulted in enormous hypertrophy of the derma and subcutaneous tissue, and we infected and reinfected her until we had succeeded in producing the highly interesting result you observe. It was a little difficult to prevent the hypertrophy spreading to her neck and face, but I am not the greatest doctor in the world for nothing. She suffers nothing now, for the progress of her condition has brought a permanent insensitiveness, but there were several times during the progress of our work when we had to keep her drugged. Elephantiasis begins as an erysipelatus inflammation, you know, and the accompanying lymphangitis and fever are uncomfortable.

"Internally she's quite healthy, and Mishkin makes her face up every day with loving care—too loving, sometimes. I caught him kissing her one day and beat him for an hour with the knout.

"That put a chill upon her ardor. I do not let him feed her. That is my own delightful duty. She bit me once—the lovely little vixen!—but that was long ago. Now she's as tame and gentle as a kitten.

"Ingenious, having her room lined with mirrors, isn't it? No matter which way she may look—up, down or sidewise—she cannot fail to contemplate herself, and compare her present state of loveliness with what she once possessed.

"Viki!" he rattled the bars of her cage. "Sing for our guest, Viki!"

She regarded him a moment with incurious, thoughtful eyes, but there was no recognition in her glance, no sign that she had heard his command.

"Viki!" Again he spoke sharply. "Will you sing, or must we get the branding-iron out?"

I saw a spasm of quick pain and ap-

prehension flash across her face, and: "That is always effective," he told me, with another soft laugh. "You see, we altered Pedro Attavanti, too. Not very much. We only blinded him and moved his scalp down to his face—a very simple little grafting operation—but he went mad while we were working on him. Unfortunately, we were short of anesthetics, and non-Aryans lack the fortitude of the superior races. Once a day we let him have his violin, and he seems quite happy while he plays. When Viki is intractable we have an excellent use for him. She can't bear to see him suffer; so when we bring him to her door and let her watch us burn him with hot irons she does whatever we ask her.

"Shall we get the irons, Viki," he turned to the monstrous woman-headed thing in the cell, "or will you sing?"

The hideous creature threw its lovely head back, breathing deeply. I could see the wattled skin beneath the throat swell like a puffing toad as it filled its lungs with breath; then, clear and sweet and true as ever Viki Boehm had sung upon the concert stage, I heard her voice raised in the final aria of *Faust*:

"Holy angels, in heaven blest,
My spirit longs with thee to rest . . ."

Surely, the ecstatic melody of that prison scene was never more appropriately sung than by that toad-thing with a lovely woman's head.

The song still mounted poignantly with an almost piercing clarity as Friedrichsohn slammed the door and with a jerk that almost pulled me off my feet dragged me down the hall.

"YOU'LL be interested in my heart experiment, *Herr Doktor,*" he assured me. "This is a more ambitious scheme, a far more complicated——"

I jerked against the harness that confined me. "Stop it!" I demanded. "I don't want to see your fiend's work, you sadistic devil. Why don't you kill me and have done with——"

"Kill you?" The mild, surprised reproach in his voice was almost pathetic. "Why, Doctor Trowbridge, I would not kill anyone, intentionally. Sometimes my patients die, unfortunately, but, believe me, I feel worse about it than they do. It's terribly annoying, really, to carry an experiment almost to completion, then have your work entirely nullified by the patient's inconsiderate death. I assure you it upsets me dreadfully. A little while ago I had almost finished grafting arms and legs and half the pelt from a gorilla to an almost perfect human specimen, a truck driver whose capture caused me no end of trouble, and would you believe it, the inconsiderate fellow died and robbed me of a major triumph. That sort of thing is very disconcerting. Shall we proceed?"

"No, damn you!" I blazed back. "I'll see myself in hell before——"

"Surely, you're not serious, Doctor?" He dropped his hand upon my shoulder, feeling with quick-kneading fingers for the middle cervical ganglion. "You really mean you will not come with me?" With a finger hard and pitiless as a steel bolt he thrust downward on my spine, and everything went red before me in a sudden blaze of torment. It was as if my head and neck and throat were an enormous exposed nerve on which he bore with fiendish pressure. I felt myself reel drunkenly, heard myself groan piteously.

"You will come with me now, won't you, *lieber kollege?*" he asked as he released the pressure momentarily,

then bore down on my spine again until it seemed to me my heart had quite stopped beating, then started up again with a cold, nauseating lurch. I could see his eyes blaze at me through the dark, feel his fingers fumbling at my skull-base.

"Don't—don't!" I panted, sick with pain. "I'll——"

"Ist gut. Of course you will. I knew that you would not be stubborn. As I was saying, this next experiment I propose making is more ambitious than any I have tried before. It involves the psyche quite as much as the body. Tell me, Doctor, is it your opinion that the physical attraction we call love springs more from contemplation of the loved one's face or figure?"

He tapped me on the shoulder with a rigid forefinger, and I shrank from the contact as from a heated iron. Sick revulsion flooded through me. What atrocity was hatching in the diseased mind of this completely irresponsible mad genius?

"Why—I—what do you mean?" I stammered stupidly. My head and neck still pained me so that I could hardly think.

"Precisely what I say, *mein lieber kollege,"* he snapped back acidly. "Every day we see cases which make us wonder. Men love and marry women with faces which might put Medusa to shame, but with bodies which might make a Venus jealous. Or, by contrast, they fall in love with pretty faces set on bodies which lack every element of beauty, or which may even be deformed. Women marry men with similar attributes. Can you explain these vagaries?"

"Of course not," I returned. "Human beings aren't mere animals. Physical attraction plays its part, naturally, but intellectual affinity, the soul——"

"The psyche, if you please, *mein kollege.* Let us not be mediæval in our terminology."

"All right, the psyche, then. We see beneath the surface, find spiritual qualities that attract us, and base our love on them. A love with nothing but the outward-seeming of the body for foundation is unworthy of the name. It couldn't last——"

"Fool!" he half laughed and half snarled. "You believe in idealistic love—in the love that casteth out fear and endureth all things?"

"Absolutely——"

"So do those two down there——"

HE HAD halted at a turning of the hallway; as he spoke he pressed a lever, sliding back a silent panel in the floor. Immediately beneath us was a small room, comfortably furnished and well lighted. On a couch before the open fire a boy and girl were seated, hand in hand, fear written on their faces.

He was a lad of twenty-two or so, slightly made, with sleek, fair hair and a ruddy, fresh complexion. I did not need to hear him speak to know that he was English, or that I had the answer to the disappearance of the British consul's messenger.

The girl was younger by a year or so, and dark as her companion was blond.

Their costumes and positions were reminiscent of domestic bliss as portrayed in the more elaborate motion pictures; he wore a suit of violet pajamas beneath a lounging-robe of purple silk brocade, and a pair of purple kid house-boots. She was clothed in an elaborate hostess coat of Persian pattern, all-enveloping from throat to insteps, but so tight from neck to hips that it hid her lissome form no more

than the apple's skin conceals the fruit's contours. From hips to hem it flared out like a ballerina's skirt. Laced to her feet with narrow strips of braided scarlet leather were brightly gilded sandals with cork soles at least four inches thick, and the nails of her exquisitely formed hands and feet were lacquered brilliant red to match the sandal straps.

"No," she was saying as Friedrichsohn slid back the panel, "it isn't hopeless, dear. They're sure to find us sometime—why, you were a king's messenger; the consulate will turn the country inside out——"

His bitter laugh broke in. "No chance! I've stultified myself, blasted my name past all redemption. They'll let me rot, and never turn a hand——"

"Neville! What do you mean?"

He put his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his cupped hands. "I should have let 'em kill me first," he sobbed, "but—oh, my dear, you can't imagine how they hurt me! First they beat me with a strap, and when that didn't break my spirit the little man with the black glasses did something to my neck—I don't know what—that made me feel as if I had a dentist's drill in every tooth at once. I couldn't stand the dreadful pain, and—and so I signed it, Lord forgive me!"

"Signed what, dearest?"

"A letter to the consul tellin' him I'd sold the papers that he'd trusted with me to the Germans, and that I'd hooked it with the money. I shouldn't have found it hard to die, dear, but the pain—the awful pain——"

"Of course, my dear, my poor, sweet dear"—she took his head against her bosom and rocked it back and forth as if he were a fretful child and she his mother—"I understand. Rita understands, dear, and so will they when we get out of here. No one's responsible for things he's done when he's been tortured. Think of the people who denied their faith when they were on the rack——"

"And of the ones who had the stuff to stick it!" he sobbed miserably.

"Honey, listen. I don't love you 'cause you're strong and masterful and heroic; I love you 'cause you're you." She stopped his wild self-accusation with a kiss. Then back again to her first theme:

"They're sure to find us, dear. This is Twentieth Century America. Two people can't just disappear and stay that way. The police, the G-men——"

"How long have we been here?" he interrupted.

"I—I don't quite know. Not being able to look out and see the sun, I can't form estimates of time. We don't know even when it's night and when it's day, do we? All I remember is that I was late in leaving Philadelphia and I was hurrying to avoid the evening traffic from New York when, just outside of Cranberry, something flew against my face and stung me. I thought at first that it was a mosquito, but that was silly. Even Jersey skeeters don't come around in February. The next thing I knew I was awfully dizzy and the car was rocking crazily from one side of the road to the other; then—here I was. I found myself in a soft bed, and my clothes were gone, but these sandals and this house-coat were laid out for me. There was a bathroom letting off my chamber, and when I'd finished showering I found breakfast—or maybe it was luncheon or dinner—waiting for me on a tray beside the bed. They don't intend to starve us, sugar, that's a sure thing. Haven't you been well fed, too?"

"Yes, I have. My experience was

about the same as yours, except that I've seen them, the tall, thin man who looks like a walkin' corpse, and the little pipsqueak with black glasses. But I didn't see 'em till today—or was it yesterday? I can't seem to remember."

The girl knit her smooth brows. "Neither can I. I've tried to keep count of the meals they've served, allowing three meals to a day, so I could form some estimate of the time I've been here, and I've tried so hard to lie in wait and catch the one who serves 'em; but somehow I always seem to fall asleep, no matter how I strive to keep awake, and—it's funny about sleeping, isn't it? When you wake up you can't say if you've just dozed for five minutes or slept around the clock——"

The boy sat forward suddenly, gripping both her hands in his. "That's it! I'm sure of it! No wonder time seems to stand still in this place! They drug us—dope us some way, so that we go to sleep whenever they desire it. We don't know how long these drugged sleeps last. We may have been here weeks, months——"

"No, dear," she shook her head. "It isn't summer, yet. We haven't been here months."

"We may have been." Wild panic had him in its grip, his voice was rising, growing thin, hysterical. "How can you tell?"

"Silly!" She bent and kissed him. "Call it woman's intuition if you like, but I am sure we haven't been cooped up here for a month."

They sat in silence a few minutes, hand interlaced in hand; then:

"Rita?"

"Yes, dear?"

"When we get out—if we get out, and if I square myself with the Chief —will you marry me?"

"Try to keep me from it, Mister Southerby, and you'll find yourself right in the middle of the tidiest breach-of-promise suit you ever saw! D'ye think that you can compromise me like this, sit here with me, dressed as we are, and without a chaperone, then ride off gayly? You'll make an honest woman of me, young feller me lad, or——" Her mask of badinage fell away, leaving her young face as ravaged as a garden after a hail storm. "Oh, Neville, you do think they'll find us, don't you?"

IT WAS his turn to comfort her. "Of course, of course, my darling!" he whispered. "They'll find us. They can't help but find us. Then——"

"Yes, honey, then"—she snuggled sleepily into his arms—"then we'll always be together, dear, close—so close that your dear face will be the first thing that I see when I awake, the last I see before I go to sleep. Oh, it will be heaven . . . heaven."

"I shall be interested to find out if it will. Time will tell, and I think time will side with me." Friedrichsohn pressed the spring that slipped the silent panel back in place, and rose, helping me up from my knees. "It will be an interesting experiment to observe, *nicht wahr, mein kollege?*"

"Wha—what d'ye mean?" I stammered, my voice almost beyond control. What dreadful plan had taken form behind that high, white brow? Would he subject this boy and girl to dreadful transformation? I had seen the remnant of the lovely Viki Boehm. Did he dare . . .

His soft, suave voice broke through my terrified imaginings. "Why, simply this, *mein lieber kollege*: They are ideal subjects for my test; better, even, than I had dared hope. I caught the girl by the simple device of waiting by the roadside with an airgun loaded with

impregnated darts. The slightest puncture of the epidermis with one of my medicated missiles paralyzes the sensory-motor nerves instantly, and as she told the young man, when she woke up she was in bed in one of my guest rooms.

"But my experiment requires Jill to have a Jack, Joan a Darby, Gretel a Hänsel, and so I set about to find a mate for her. Eventually this young man came along, and was similarly caught. I had arranged for everything. Their sleeping-quarters open on a common sitting-room, his to one side, hers upon the other. Each morning—or each night, they can't tell the difference—I permit them to awaken, open the automatic doors to their rooms, and let them visit with each other. When I think that they have made love long enough I—ah—turn the current off and put them back to sleep."

"How do you mean——"

"Have not you noticed a peculiar odor here?"

"Yes, I smelled the incense when I first came in——"

"Jawohl. That is it. I have perfected an anesthetic gas which, according to the strength of its concentration, can put one in a state of perfect anesthesia in a minute, a second, or immediately. It is almost odorless, and such slight odor as it has is completely masked by the incense. Periodically I put them to sleep, then let them reawaken. That is why they cannot guess the intervals of time between their meetings, and—what is more important—when they begin to reason out too much, I see that they become unconscious quickly. I turned the anesthetic on when he began to guess too accurately concerning my technique a moment ago. By this time both of them are sleeping soundly, and Mishkin has taken them to bed. When I see fit, I shall allow them to awake and eat and take their conversation up where they left off, but I do not think they will. They are too preoccupied with each other to give much thought to me—just now, at least."

"How long have they been here?" I asked. "I heard her say that she came first——"

"What is time?" he laughed. "She does not know how long she's been my guest; neither does he, nor you, *Herr Doktor.* It may have been a night I let you sleep in Stravinsky's cell, or it may have been a week, or two——"

"That's nonsense," I cut in. "I should have been half starved if that were so. As it is, I'm not even feeling hungry——"

"How do you know we did not feed you with a nasal tube while you were sleeping?"

I HAD not thought of that. It upset my calculations utterly. Certainly in normal circumstances I should have been ravenous if I'd been there but four and twenty hours. A longer period without nourishment and I should have felt weak, yet I felt no hunger. . . .

"To return to our young lovers," Friedrichsohn reminded me. "They are better suited to my purpose; better, even, than I'd thought. When I captured him I could not know that they had known each other for some time, and were more than merely mildly interested in each other. Since they have been my guests, propinquity has made that interest blossom into full-blown love. Tomorrow, or the next day—or the next day after that—I think I shall begin to work on them."

"To—work—on—them?"

"Jawohl, mein lieber kollege. You saw the fascinating beauty treatment I

gave Viki Boehm? *Ist gut.* I shall put them quietly to sleep and subject them to precisely similar ministrations. When they awake they'll find themselves in the dove-cote I have prepared for them. It is a charming, cozy little place where they can contemplate each other as the little lady said, where the face of each shall be the first thing that the other sees when he awakes, the last thing he beholds before he goes to sleep. It is larger than the chamber I assigned to Viki—more than twice as large—and one of them shall rest at one end of it while the other occupies the other, facing him. It has been lined with mirrors, too, so that they can see themselves and each other from both front and back. That is necessary, *Herr Doktor,* since they will not be able to turn around. Lacking legs, a person finds himself severely handicapped in moving, *lieber freund.*"

"But why should you do this to them?" I faltered, knowing even as I asked the question that reason had no part in his wild plans.

"Can you ask that after our discussion of the merits of the face and form as stimulants of love? I am surprised and disappointed in you, *mein kollege.* It is to see if love—the love they pledge so tenderly to each other—can stand the sight of hideous deformity in the loved one. Their faces will be as they are now, only their forms will be altered. If they continue to express affection for each other I shall know the face is that which energizes love, but if—as I am sure they will—they turn from each other in loathing and abhorrence, I shall have proven that the form is more important. It will be a most diverting comedy to watch, *nicht wahr, Herr Doktor?*"

Horror drove my pulses to a hurrying rhythm. Something sharp, something penetrating as a cold and whetted knife-blade, seemed probing at my insides. I wanted to cry out against this outrage, to pray; but I could not. Heaven seemed unreal and infinitely far away with this phosphorescent-eyed monstrosity at my elbow, his pitiless, purring voice outlining plans which outdid hell in hellish ingenuity.

"You can't—you can't do this!" I gasped. "You wouldn't dare! You'll be found out!"

"That's what Viki Boehm said when I told her of the future I had planned for her," he broke in with a susurrating laugh. "But they didn't find me out. They never will, *Herr Doktor.* This is a madhouse—pardon me, a sanitarium—duly licensed by the state and impervious to private inquiry. People expect to hear cries and shrieks and insane laughter from such places. Passers-by and neighbors are not even curious. My grounds are posted against trespassers; your law insures my privacy, and no one, not even the police, may enter here without a warrant. I have a crematory fully equipped and ready to be used instantly. If attempts are made to search the house I can destroy incriminating evidence—inanimate *and* animate—in a moment and without trouble. I shall prosecute my work uninterrupted, *lieber kollege*—and that reminds me, I have a proposal to make you."

HE HAD reached the red-walled room again, and he pushed me suddenly, forcing me into a chair.

"There are times when I feel Mishkin is inadequate," he said, taking out a cigarette and setting it alight. "I have taught him much, but his lack of early training often makes him bungle things. I need a skilled assistant, one with surgical experience, capable of helping me

in operations. I think you are admirably fitted for this work. Will you enlist with me——"

"If" I gasped. "I'll see you damned first."

"Or will you fill Stravinsky's coffin?"

"Stravinsky's—coffin?"

"Exactly. You remember that I told you Abraham Stravinsky was a patient here and that he died the day you came? *Jawohl.* His family have not yet been notified of his death. His body is preserved and waiting shipment. Should you accept my offer I shall notify his relatives and send his corpse to them without delay. If you decline" —the green eyes seemed to brighten in the gloom as they peered at me—"I shall put him in the crematory, and you shall take his place in the coffin. He was a Hebrew of the orthodox persuasion, and as such will have a plain pine coffin, rather than a casket. I have several boxes like that ready, one of them for you, unless you choose to join me. You are also doubtless aware that the rules of his religion require burial of the dead within twenty-four hours of death. For that reason there is small fear that the coffin will be opened. But if it should be, his family will not know that it is you and not their kinsman whom they see. I shall say he died in an insane seizure, as a consequence of which he was quite battered in the face.

"You need not fear, *mein lieber kollege*: the body will be admirably battered—past all recognition. Mishkin will attend to all the details. He has a very dexterous talent with the ax, but——"

"But he will not exercise it, I damn think!" From behind me Jules de Grandin spoke in ordinary conversational tone, but I recognized the flatness of his voice. Cyclopean fury boiled in him, I knew. Friedrichsohn might be insane, fierce and savage as a tiger; de Grandin was his match in fierceness, and his clear French brain was burdened with no trace of madness.

"Kreuzsakrament!" As de Grandin stepped before me Friedrichsohn launched himself across the table, leaping like a maddened leopard. "You—"

"It is I, indeed, thou very naughty fellow," de Grandin answered, and as the other clawed at him rose suddenly into the air, as if he were a bouncing ball, brought both feet up at once, and kicked his adversary underneath the chin, hurling him unconscious to the floor. *"Tiens,* a knowledge of *la savate* is very useful now and then," he murmured, as he turned and loosed the strap that bound my arms and transferred it to his fallen foeman. "So, my most unpleasant friend, you will do quite nicely thus," he said, then turned to me.

"Embrasse moi!" he commanded. "Oh, Trowbridge, *cher ami, brave camarade,* I had feared this stinking villain had done you an injury. *Alors,* I find you safe and sound, but"—he grinned as he inspected me—"you would look more better if you had more clothing on!"

"There's a chest behind you," I suggested. "Perhaps——"

He was already rummaging in the wardrobe, flinging out a miscellany of garments. "These would be those of Monsieur Southerby"—he tossed a well-cut tweed suit on the floor—"and these a little lady's"—a woolen traveling-suit with furred collar came to join the man's clothes. "And this—ah, here they are!" My own clothes came down from the hooks and he thrust them at me.

"Attire yourself, my friend," he ordered. "I have work elsewhere. If he shows signs of consciousness, knock

him on the silly head. I shall return for him anon."

HURRYING footsteps clattered on the floor outside as I dragged on my clothes. A shout, the echo of a shot....

I flung the door back just in time to see de Grandin lower his pistol as Mishkin staggered toward the front door, raised both arms above his head and crashed sprawling to the floor.

"My excellent de Grandin!" Jules de Grandin told himself. "You never miss, you are incomparable. *Parbleu,* but I admire you——"

"Look, look!" I shouted. "The lamp——"

Clawing blindly in the agony of death, Mishkin's hand had knocked one of the red-globed oil lamps from its place before a statuary niche. The lacquer-coated, oil-soaked walls were tinder to the flame, and already fire was running up them like a curtain.

"In there," I cried. "Southerby and a young girl are locked up there somewhere, and——"

"Hi, Frenchy, where the devil are you?" Hiji's hail came from the transverse corridor. "Find Trowbridge yet? We've got Southerby and a——" He staggered out into the central hall with the still unconscious Southerby held in his arms as if he were a sleeping babe. Behind him came Costello with the girl, who was also sunk deep in anesthesia.

"Whew, it's gettin' hotter than Dutch love in here!" the Englishman exclaimed. "We'd best be hookin' it, eh, what?"

"Indubitably what, my friend," de Grandin answered. "One moment, if you please." He dashed into the red room, reappearing in a moment with arms filled with clothes. "These are their proper raiment," he called, draping the garments over Hiji's shoulder. "Take them to the garage and bid them dress themselves becomingly for public appearance. Me, I have another task to do. Assist me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge."

Back in the red-walled room he raised the fallen madman, signing me to help him. "The place will be a furnace in a moment," he panted, "and me, I am not even one of the so estimable young Hebrews who made mock of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery wrath. We must hasten if we do not wish to cook!"

He had not exaggerated. The oil-soaked walls and floors were all ablaze; lashing, crackling flames swept up the stairway as if it were a chimney flue.

"Good heavens!" I cried, suddenly remembering. "Up there—he's got two others locked in cells——"

Down from the upper story, clear and sweet and growing stronger, came a voice, the voice of Viki Boehm:

"So stürben wir, um ungetrennt,
Ewig einig ohne end . . ."

"So should we die, no more to part,
Ever in one endless joy . . ."

The mounting notes of a violin accompanied the words of Tristan and Isolde's plea for death which should unite them in the mystic world beyond life.

"Mon Dieu! Concede misericors, Deus . . ." De Grandin looked up at the fire-choked stairway. "There is no chance of reaching them——"

The crash of breaking timbers drowned his words, and a gust of flame and sparks burst from the stairwell as the draft was forced down by the falling floors. The song had died; only the roar of blazing, oil-soaked wood sounded as we bent our heads against the smoke and staggered toward the door. "It is their funeral pyre

—*fidelium animae per misericordiam Dei, requiescant in pace!*" de Grandin panted. "*A-a-ah!*"

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are you——"

"Bid Hiji or Costello come at once!" he groaned. "I—am—unable——"

"You're hurt?" I cried solicitously.

"*Vite, vite*—get one of them!" he choked.

I rushed through the front door and circled around the house toward the garage. "Hiji—Costello!" I shouted. "Come quickly, de Grandin's hurt——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, mon ami,* on the contrary I am in the best of health, and as pleased as I can be in all the circumstances." At my very heels de Grandin stood and grinned at me.

"You got clear? Good!" I exclaimed. Then: "Where's Friedrichsohn?"

There was no more expression in his small blue eyes than if they had been china eyes in a doll's face. "He was detained," he answered in a level voice. "He could not come."

Suddenly I felt an overmastering weakness. It seemed to me I had not eaten for a year; the cold bit at my bones as if it were a rabid wolf. "What day is it?" I asked.

"You are unpatriotic, my friend. It is the anniversary of the Great Emancipator's birth. Did not you know?"

"February twelfth? Why, that's today!"

"*Mon Dieu,* what did you think it was, tomorrow or yesterday?"

"But—I mean—we left Harrisonville on the morning of the twelfth, and I've been in that place at least——"

He glanced down at his wrist watch. "A little over two hours. If we hasten we shall be in time to lunch at Keyport. They have delicious lobster there."

"But—but——"

"Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin, these are Miss Perinchief and Mr. Southerby," Hiji broke in as he and Costello came from the garage shepherding a most ecstatic-looking pair of youngsters.

"I've seen——" I began; then: "I'm very glad to meet you both." I acknowledged the introduction.

HE MADE me tell him my adventures from the moment I had left him by the brook where Southerby's car was foundered, listening with tear-filled eyes as I described the loathsome things Friedrichsohn had made of Viki Boehm and her husband, weeping unashamedly when I recounted what I'd overheard while I looked through the trap-door into the room in which young Southerby and Rita Perinchief confessed their love. "And now, in heaven's name, what were you doing all that time?" I asked.

"When you failed to return we were puzzled. Costello wished to go to the farmhouse and inquire for you, but I would not permit it. One look at that place and I knew it had the smell of fish upon it. So I posted them out by the great tree at the turning of the driveway, where they could be in plain sight while I crept around the house and sought an opening. At the last I had to cut the lock away from the back door, and that took time. I do not doubt the Mishkin rascal watched them from some point of vantage. *Bien.* While he was thus engaged Jules de Grandin was at work at the back door.

"At last I forced an entrance, tiptoed to the front door and unfastened it, signaling to them that all was well. I was waiting for them when I saw that *sale chameau* Friedrichsohn come down the stairs with you.

"'Can this be endured?' I ask me. 'Can anyone be permitted to lead my good Friend Trowbridge as if he were a dog upon a leash? *Mais non,* Jules de Grandin, you must see to this.' So I crept up to the room where he had taken you and listened at the keyhole. *Voilà tout.* The rest you know."

"No, I don't," I denied. "How did Hiji and Costello know where to look for Southerby and Rita?"

"*Tiens,* they did not know at all, my friend. They came in and looked about, and they espied the Mishkin rogue on guard before their prison door. He ran, and they broke down the door and brought the prisoners out. They should have shot him first. They have no judgment in such matters. *Eh bien,* I was there. It is perhaps as well. I have had no target practise for a long, long time——"

"Did they find the papers Southerby was carrying?"

"But yes. Friedrichsohn set no value on them. They were in the desk of the room where you first saw him. Hiji has them safely in his pocket."

"It seems incredible I was in there such a little while," I mused. "I could have sworn that I was there at least a week——"

"Ah, my friend, time passes slowly in a prison. What you thought was hours' space as you lay shivering in that cell was really only half an hour or so. Time does not pass at all, it stands entirely still while you are sleeping. They rendered you unconscious with their gas, and woke you in perhaps five minutes. Suggestion did the rest. You thought that you had slept around the clock-dial, and since you could not see the sun, you had no clue to what the hour really was. Sleep and our own imaginings play strange tricks upon us, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

THE broiled live lobster was, as he had promised, delicious. Luncheon done, de Grandin, Hiji and Costello marched toward the bar, with me bringing up the rear. Neville Southerby and Rita Perinchief cuddled close together on a settle set before the fireplace in the lounge. As I passed the inglenook in which they snuggled side by side, I heard her: "Honey lamb, I think I know how Robinson Crusoe felt about his island when they'd rescued him. He kept remembering it all his life, and even though he'd undergone a lot of hardships there, he loved it. Somehow, I'll always feel that way about the place that madman shut us up in. Just suppose they'd never found us . . . suppose we'd stayed there always, just the two of us, being with each other always, looking at each other . . . we might have been changed some by being cooped up, but——"

"*Morbleu,* my friend, you look as if you'd seen a most unpleasant ghost!" de Grandin told me as I joined them at the bar and reached unsteadily for a drink.

"I have," I answered with a shudder. "A most unpleasant one."

The Return of Hastur

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

An eldritch tale about the Ancient Ones and the incredible horror that terrified a peaceful New England countryside

ACTUALLY, it began a long time ago: how long, I have not dared to guess: but so far as my own connection with the case that has ruined my practise and earned me the dubiety of the medical profession in regard to my sanity is concerned, it began with Amos Tuttle's death. That was on a night in late winter, with a south wind blowing on the edge of spring. I had been in ancient, legend-haunted Arkham that day; he had learned of my presence there from Doctor Ephraim Sprague, who attended him, and had the doctor call the Lewiston House and bring me to that gloomy estate on the Aylesbury Road near the Innsmouth Turnpike. It was not a place to which I liked to go, but the old man had paid me well to tolerate his sullenness and eccentricity, and Sprague had made it clear that he was dying: a matter of hours.

And he was. He had hardly the strength to motion Sprague from the room and talk to me, though his voice came clearly enough and with little effort.

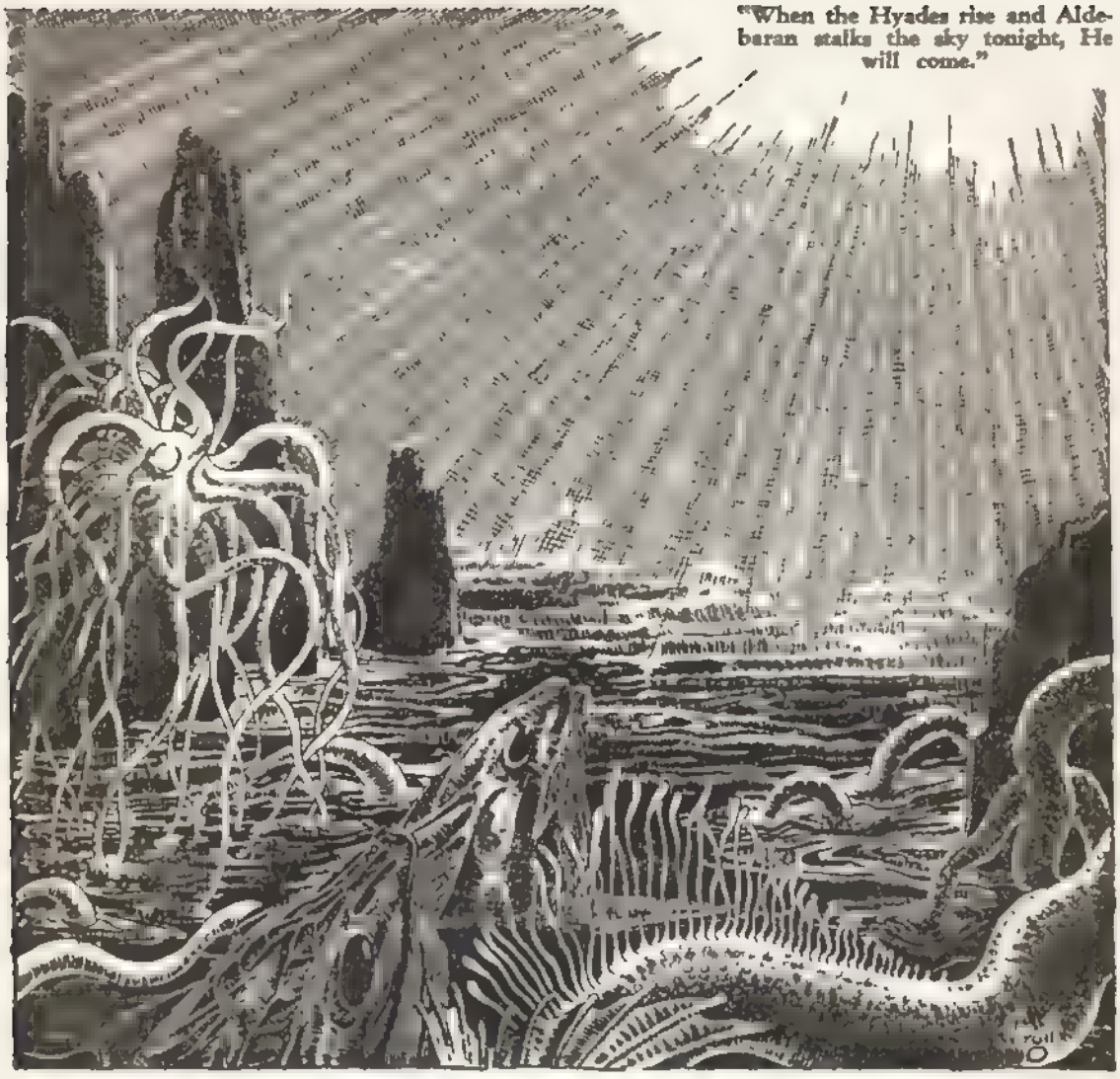
"You know my will," he said. "Stand by it to the letter."

That will had been a bone of contention between us because of its provision that before his heir and sole surviving nephew, Paul Tuttle, could claim his estate, the house would have to be destroyed—not taken down, but *destroyed,* together with certain books designated by shelf number in his final instructions. His death-bed was no place to debate this wanton destruction anew; I nodded, and he accepted that. Would to heaven I had obeyed without question!

"Now then," he went on, "there's a book downstairs you must take back to the library of Miskatonic University."

He gave me the title. At that time it meant little to me; but it has since come to mean more than I can say—a symbol of age-old horror, of maddening things beyond the thin veil of prosaic daily life—the Latin translation of the abhorred *Necronomicon* by the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred.

I found the book easily enough. For the last two decades of his life Amos Tuttle had lived in increasing seclusion among books collected from all parts of the world: old, worm-eaten texts, with titles that might have frightened away a less hardened man—the sinister *De Vermis Mysteriis* of Ludvig Prinn, Comte d'Erlette's terrible *Cultes des Ghoules,* von Junzt's damnable *Unaussprechlichen Kulten.* I did not then know how rare these were, nor did I understand the priceless rarity of certain fragmentary pieces: the frightful *Book of Eibon,* the horror-fraught *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* and the dread *R'lyeh Text;* for these, I found upon an examination of his accounts after Amos Tuttle's death, he had paid a fabulous sum. But nowhere did I find



"When the Hyades rise and Aldebaran stalks the sky tonight, He will come."

so high a figure as that he had paid for the *R'lyeh Text,* which had come to him from somewhere in the dark interior of Asia; according to his files, he had paid for it no less than one hundred thousand dollars; but in addition to this, there was present in his account in regard to this yellowed manuscript a notation which puzzled me at the time, but which I was to have ominous cause to remember—after the sum above mentioned, Amos Tuttle had written in his spidery hand: ***in addition to the promise.***

These facts did not come out until Paul Tuttle was in possession, but before that, several strange occurrences took place, things that should have aroused my suspicion in regard to the countryside legends of some powerful supernatural influence clinging to the old house. The first of these was of small consequence in view of the others; it was simply that upon returning the *Necronomicon* to the library of Miskatonic University at Arkham, I found myself conveyed by a tight-lipped librarian straightway to the office of the director, Doctor Llanfer, who asked me bluntly to account for the book's

being in my hands. I had no hesitation in doing so, and thereby discovered that the rare volume was never permitted out of the library, that, in fact, Amos Tuttle had abstracted it on one of his rare visits, having failed in his attempts to persuade Doctor Llanfer to permit his borrowing it. And Amos had been clever enough to prepare in advance a marvelously good imitation of the book, with a binding almost flawless in its resemblance, and the actual reproduction of title and opening pages of the text reproduced from his memory; upon the occasion of his handling the mad Arab's book, he had substituted his dummy for the original and gone off with one of the two copies of this shunned work available on the North American continent, one of the five copies known to be in existence in the world.

The second of these things was a little more startling, though it bears the trappings of conventional haunted house stories. Both Paul Tuttle and I heard at odd times in the house at night, while his uncle's corpse lay there particularly, the sound of padding footsteps, but there was this strangeness about them: they were not like footsteps falling within the house at all, but like the steps of some creature in size almost beyond the conception of man walking at a great distance *underground*, so that the sound actually *vibrated* into the house from the depths of earth below. And when I have reference to *steps*, it is only for lack of a better word to describe the sounds, for they were not flat steps at all, but a kind of spongy, jelly-like, sloshing sound made with the force of so much weight behind them that the consequent shuddering of earth in that place was communicated to us in the way we heard it. There was nothing more than this, and presently it was gone, ceasing, coincidentally enough, in the hours of that dawn when Amos Tuttle's corpse was borne away forty-eight hours sooner than we had planned. The sounds we dismissed as settlings of the earth along the distant coast, not alone because we did not attach too great an importance to them, but because of the final thing that took place before Paul Tuttle officially took possession of the old house on the Aylesbury Road.

This last thing was the most shocking of all, and of the three who knew it, only I now remain alive, Doctor Sprague being dead this day month, though he took only one look and said, "Bury him at once!" And so we did, for the change in Amos Tuttle's body was ghastly beyond conception, and especially horrible in its suggestion, and it was so because the body was *not* falling into any visible decay, but changing subtly in another way, becoming suffused with a weird iridescence, which darkened presently until it was almost ebon, and the appearance on the flesh of his puffy hands and face of minute, scale-like growths. There was likewise some change about the shape of his head; it seemed to lengthen, to take on a curious kind of fish-like look, accompanied by a faint exudation of thick fish smell from the coffin; and that these changes were not purely imaginative was shockingly substantiated when the body was subsequently found in the place where its malignant after-dweller had conveyed it, and there, at last falling into putrefaction though it was, others saw with me the terrible, suggestive changes that had taken place, though they had mercifully no knowledge of what had gone before. But at the time when Amos Tuttle lay in the old house, there was no hint of what

was to come; we were quick to close the coffin and quicker still to take it to the ivy-covered Tuttle vault in Arkham cemetery.

Paul Tuttle was at that time in his late forties, but, like so many men of his generation, he had the face and figure of a youth in his twenties. Indeed, the only hint of his age lay in the faint traces of gray in the hair of his mustache and temples. He was a tall, dark-haired man, slightly overweight, with frank blue eyes which years of scholarly research had not reduced to the necessity of glasses. Nor was he ignorant of law, for he quickly made known that if I, as his uncle's executor, were not disposed to overlook the clause in his will that called for the destruction of the house on the Aylesbury Road, he would contest the will on the justifiable ground of Amos Tuttle's insanity. I pointed out to him that he stood alone against Doctor Sprague and me, but I was at the same time not blind to the fact that the unreasonableness of the request might very well defeat us; besides, I myself considered the clause in this regard amazingly wanton in the destruction it demanded, and was not prepared to fight a contest because of so minor a matter. Yet, could I have foreseen what was to come, could I have dreamed of the horror to follow, I would have carried out Amos Tuttle's last request regardless of any decision of the court. However, such foresight was not mine.

We went to see Judge Wilton, Tuttle and I, and put the matter before him. He agreed with us that the destruction of the house seemed needless, and more than once hinted at concurrence with Paul Tuttle's belief in his late uncle's madness.

"The old man's been touched for as long as I knew him," he said dryly. "And as for you, Haddon, can you get up on a stand and swear that he was absolutely sane?"

Remembering with a certain uneasiness the theft of the *Necronomicon* from Miskatonic University, I had to confess that I could not.

So Paul Tuttle took possession of the estate on the Aylesbury road, and I went back to my legal practise in Boston, not dissatisfied with the way things had gone, and yet not without a lurking uneasiness difficult to define, an insidious feeling of impending tragedy, no little fed by my memory of what we had seen in Amos Tuttle's coffin before we sealed and locked it away in the centuries-old vault in Arkham cemetery.

2

It was not for some time that I saw the gambrel roofs and Georgian balustrades of witch-cursed Arkham again, and then was there on business for a client who wished me to see to it that his property in ancient Innsmouth was protected from the Government agents and police who had taken possession of the shunned and haunted town, though it was now some months since the mysterious dynamiting of blocks of the waterfront buildings and part of the terror-hung Devil Reef in the sea beyond—a mystery which has been carefully guarded and hidden since then, though I have learned of a paper purporting to give the true facts of the Innsmouth horror, a privately published manuscript written by a Providence author. It was impossible at that time to proceed to Innsmouth because Secret Service men had closed all roads; however, I made representations to the proper persons and received an assurance that my client's property would be fully protected, since it lay well back

from the waterfront; so I proceeded about other small matters in Arkham.

I went to luncheon that day in a small restaurant near Miskatonic University, and while there, heard myself accosted in a familiar voice. I looked up and saw Doctor Llanfer, the university library's director. He seemed somewhat upset, and betrayed his concern clearly in his features. I invited him to join me, but he declined; he did, however, sit down, somewhat on the chair's edge.

"Have you been out to see Paul Tuttle?" he asked abruptly.

"I thought of going this afternoon," I replied. "Is anything wrong?"

He flushed a little guiltily. "That I can't say," he answered precisely. "But there have been some nasty rumors loose in Arkham. And the *Necronomicon* is gone again."

"Good Heaven! you're surely not accusing Paul Tuttle of having taken it?" I exclaimed, half in surprise, half amused. "I could not imagine of what use it might be to him."

"Still—he has it," Doctor Llanfer persisted. "But I don't think he stole it, and should not like to be understood as saying so. It is my own opinion that one of our clerks gave it to him and is now reluctant to confess the enormity of his error. Be that as it may, the book has not come back, and I fear we shall have to go after it."

"I could ask him about it," I said.

"If you would, thank you," responded Doctor Llanfer, a little eagerly. "I take it you've heard nothing of the rumors that are rife here?"

I shook my head.

"Very likely they are only the outgrowth of some imaginative mind," he continued, but the air of him suggested that he was not willing or able to accept so prosaic an explanation. "It appears that passengers along the Aylesbury Road have heard strange sounds late at night, all apparently emanating from the Tuttle house."

"What sounds?" I asked, not without immediate apprehension.

"Apparently those of footsteps; and yet, I understand no one will definitely say so, save for one young man who characterized them as *soggy* and said that they sounded as if *something big was walking in mud and water near by.*"

The strange sounds Paul Tuttle and I had heard on the night following Amos Tuttle's death had passed from my mind, but at this mention of footsteps by Doctor Llanfer, the memory of what I had heard returned in full. I fear I gave myself slightly away, for Doctor Llanfer observed my sudden interest; fortunately, he chose to interpret it as evidence that I had indeed heard something of these rumors, my statement to the contrary notwithstanding. I did not choose to correct him in this regard, and at the same time I experienced a sudden desire to hear no more; so I did not press him for further details, and presently he rose to return to his duties, and left me with my promise to ask Paul Tuttle for the missing book still sounding in my ears.

His story, however slight it was, nevertheless sounded within me a note of alarm; I could not help recalling the numerous small things that held to memory—the steps we had heard, the odd clause in Amos Tuttle's will, the awful metamorphosis in Amos Tuttle's corpse. There was already then a faint suspicion in my mind that some sinister chain of events was becoming manifest here; my natural curiosity rose, though not without a certain feeling of distaste, a conscious desire to withdraw, and the recurrence of that strange, insidious conviction of impending tragedy. But

I determined to see Paul Tuttle as early as possible.

My work in Arkham consumed the afternoon, and it was not until dusk that I found myself standing before the massive oaken door of the old Tuttle house on Aylesbury Road. My rather peremptory knock was answered by Paul himself, who stood, lamp held high in hand, peering out into the growing night.

"Haddon!" he exclaimed, throwing the door wider. "Come in!"

That he was genuinely glad to see me I could not doubt, for the note of enthusiasm in his voice precluded any other supposition. The heartiness of his welcome also served to confirm me in my intention not to speak of the rumors I had heard, and to proceed about an inquiry after the *Necronomicon* at my own good time. I remembered that just prior to his uncle's death, Tuttle had been working on a philological treatise relating to the growth of the Sac Indian language, and determined to inquire about this paper as if nothing else were of moment.

"You've had supper, I suppose," said Tuttle, leading me down the hall and into the library.

I said that I had eaten in Arkham.

He put the lamp down upon a book-laden table, pushing some papers to one side as he did so. Inviting me to sit down, he resumed the seat he had evidently left to answer my knock. I saw now that he was somewhat disheveled, and that he had permitted his beard to grow. He had also taken on more weight, doubtless as a consequence of strictly enforced scholarship, with all its attendant confinement to the house and lack of physical exercise.

"How fares the Sac treatise?" I asked.

"I've put that aside," he said shortly. "I may take it up later. For the present, I've struck something far more important—just how important I cannot yet say."

I saw now that the books on the table were not the usual scholarly tomes I had seen on his Ipswich desk, but with some faint apprehension observed that they were the books condemned by the explicit instructions of Tuttle's uncle, as a glance at the vacant spaces on the proscribed shelves clearly corroborated.

Tuttle turned to me almost eagerly and lowered his voice as if in fear of being overheard. "As a matter of fact, Haddon, it's colossal—a gigantic feat of the imagination; only for this: I'm no longer certain that it *is* imaginative, indeed, I'm not. I wondered about that clause in my uncle's will; I couldn't understand why he should want this house destroyed, and rightly surmised that the reason must lie somewhere in the pages of those books he so carefully condemned." He waved a hand at the incunabula before him. "So I examined them, and I can tell you I have discovered things of such incredible strangeness, such bizarre horror, that I hesitate sometimes to dig deeper into the mystery. Frankly, Haddon, it is the most *outré* matter I've ever come upon, and I must say it involved considerable research, quite apart from these books Uncle Amos collected."

"Indeed," I said dryly. "And I dare say you've had to do considerable traveling?"

He shook his head. "None at all, apart from one trip to Miskatonic University Library. The fact is, I found I could be served just as well by mail. You'll remember those papers of uncle's? Well, I discovered among them that Uncle Amos paid a hundred thousand for a certain bound manu-

script—bound in human skin, incidentally—together with a cryptic line: *in addition to the promise.* I began to ask myself what promise Uncle Amos could have made, and to whom; whether to the man or woman who had sold him this *R'lyeh Text* or to some other. I proceeded forthwith to search out the name of the man who had sold him the book, and presently found it with his address: some Chinese priest from inner Tibet: and wrote to him. His reply reached me a week ago."

He bent away and rummaged briefly among the papers on his desk, until he found what he sought and handed it to me.

"I wrote in my uncle's name, not trusting entirely in the transaction, and wrote, moreover, as if I had forgotten or had a hope to avoid the promise," he continued. "His reply is fully as cryptic as my uncle's notation."

Indeed, it was so, for the crumpled paper that was handed to me bore, in a strange, stilted script, but one line, without signature or date: *To afford a haven for Him Who is not to be Named.*

I dare say I looked up at Tuttle with my wonderment clearly mirrored in my eyes, for he smiled before he replied.

"Means nothing to you, eh? No more did it to me, when first I saw it. But not for long. In order to understand what follows, you should know at least a brief outline of the mythology—if indeed it *is* only mythology—in which this mystery is rooted. My Uncle Amos apparently knew and believed all about it, for the various notes scattered in the margins of his proscribed books bespeak a knowledge far beyond mine. Apparently the mythology springs from a common source with our own legendary Genesis, but only by a very thin resemblance; sometimes I am tempted to say that this mythology is far older than any other—certainly in its implications it goes far beyond, being cosmic and ageless, for its beings are of two natures, and two only: the Old or Ancient Ones, the Elder Gods, of *cosmic good,* and those of *cosmic evil,* bearing many names, and themselves of different groups, as if associated with the elements and yet transcending them: for there are the Water Beings, hidden in the depths; those of Air that are the primal lurkers beyond time; those of Earth, horrible animate survivals of distant eons. Incredible time ago, the Old Ones banished from the cosmic places all the Evil Ones, imprisoning them in many places; but in time these Evil Ones spawned hellish minions who set about preparing for their return to greatness. The Old Ones are nameless, but their power is and will apparently always be great enough to check that of the others.

"Now, among the Evil Ones there is apparently often conflict, as among lesser beings. The Water Beings oppose those of Air; the Fire Beings oppose Earth Beings, but nevertheless, they together hate and fear the Elder Gods and hope always to defeat them in some future time. Among my Uncle Amos's papers there are many fearsome names written in his crabbed script: *Great Cthulhu, the Lake of Hali, Tsathoggua, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, Azathoth, Hastur the Unspeakable, Yuggoth, Aldones, Thale, Aldebaran, the Hyades, Carcosa,* and others: and it is possible to divide some of these names into vaguely suggestive classes from those notes which are explicable to me—though many present insoluble mysteries I cannot hope as yet to penetrate; and many, too, are written in a language I do not know, together

with cryptic and oddly frightening symbols and signs. But through what I have learned, it is possible to know that Great Cthulhu is of the Water Beings, even as Hastur is of the Beings that stalk the star-spaces; and it is possible to gather from vague hints in these forbidden books where some of these beings are. So I can believe that in this mythology, Great Cthulhu was banished to a place beneath the seas of Earth, while Hastur was hurled into outer space, into that *place where the black stars hang,* which is indicated as Aldebaran of the Hyades, which is the place mentioned by Chambers, even as he repeats the *Carcosa* of Bierce.

"Coming upon this communication from the priest in Tibet in the light of these things, surely one fact must come clearly forth: Haddon, surely, beyond the shadow of a doubt, He Who is not to be Named can be none other than Hastur the Unspeakable!"

The sudden cessation of his voice startled me; there was something hypnotic about his eager whisper, and something too that filled me with a conviction far beyond the power of Paul Tuttle's words. Somewhere, deep within the recesses of my mind, a chord had been struck, a mnemonic connection I could not dismiss nor trace and which left me with a feeling as of limitless age, a cosmic bridge into another place and time.

"That seems logical," I said at last, cautiously.

"Logical! Haddon, it *is;* it must be!" he exclaimed.

"Granting it," I said, "what then?"

"Why, granting it," he went on quickly, "we have conceded that my Uncle Amos promised to make ready a haven in preparation for the return of Hastur from whatever region of outer space now imprisons him. Where that haven is, or what manner of place it may be, has not thus far been my concern, though I can guess, perhaps. This is not the time for guessing, and yet it would seem, from certain other evidence at hand, that there may be some permissible deductions made. The first and most important of these is of a double nature—ergo, something unforeseen prevented the return of Hastur within my uncle's lifetime, and yet some other being has made itself manifest." Here he looked at me with unusual frankness and not a little nervousness. "As for the evidence of this manifestation, I would rather not at this time go into it. Suffice it to say that I believe I have such evidence at hand. I return to my original premise, then.

"Among the few marginal notations made by my uncle, there are two or three especially remarkable ones in the *R'lyeh Text;* indeed, in the light of what is known or can justifiably be guessed, they are sinister and ominous notes."

So speaking, he opened the ancient manuscript and turned to a place quite close to the beginning of the narrative.

"Now attend me, Haddon," he said, and I rose and bent over him to look at the spidery, almost illegible script that I knew for Amos Tuttle's. "Observe the underscored line of text: *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah' nagl fhtagn,* and what follows it in my uncle's unmistakable hand: *His minions preparing the way, and he no longer dreaming?* (*WT: 2/28*) and at a more recent date, to judge by the shakiness of his hand, the single abbreviation: *Inns!* Obviously, this means nothing without a translation of the text. Failing this at the moment I first saw this note, I turned my attention to the parenthetical notation, and within a short while solved its meaning as a reference to a

popular magazine, *Weird Tales,* for February, 1928. I have it here."

HE OPENED the magazine against the meaningless text, partially concealing the lines which had begun to take on an uncanny atmosphere of eldritch age beneath my eyes, and there beneath Paul Tuttle's hand lay the first page of a story so obviously belonging to this unbelievable mythology that I could not repress a start of astonishment. The title, only partly covered by his hand, was *The Call of Cthulhu,* by H. P. Lovecraft. But Tuttle did not linger over the first page; he turned well into the heart of the story before he paused and presented to my gaze the identical, unreadable line that lay beside the crabbed script of Amos Tuttle in the incredibly rare *R'lyeh Text* upon which the magazine reposed. And there, only a paragraph below, appeared what purported to be a translation of the utterly unknown language of the *Text: In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.*

"There you have it," resumed Tuttle with some satisfaction. "Cthulhu, too, waited for the time of his resurgence—how many eons, no one may know; but my uncle has questioned whether Cthulhu still lies dreaming, and following this, has written and doubly underscored an abbreviation which can only stand for *Innsmouth!* This, together with the ghastly things half hinted in this revealing story purporting to be only *fiction,* opens up a vista of undreamed horror, of age-old evil."

"Good Heaven!" I exclaimed involuntarily. "Surely you can't think this fantasy has come to life?"

Tuttle turned and gave me a strangely distant look. "What *I* think doesn't matter, Haddon," he replied gravely. "But there is one thing I would like very much to know—*what happened at Innsmouth?* What has happened there for decades past that people have shunned it so? Why has this once prosperous port sunk into oblivion, half its houses empty, its property practically worthless? And why was it necessary for Government men to blow up row after row of the waterfront dwellings and warehouses? Lastly, for what earthly reason did they send a submarine to torpedo the marine spaces beyond Devil Reef just out of Innsmouth?"

"I know nothing of that," I replied.

But he paid no heed; his voice rose a little, uncertain and trembling, and he said, "I can tell you, Haddon. It is even as my Uncle Amos has written: Great Cthulhu has risen again!"

For a moment I was shaken; then I said, "But it is Hastur for whom he waited."

"Precisely," agreed Tuttle in a clipped, professorial voice. "Then I should like to know who or what it is that walks in the earth in the dark hours when Fomalhaut has risen and the Hyades are in the east!"

3

WITH this, he abruptly changed the subject; he began to ask me questions about myself and my practise, and presently, when I rose to go, he asked me to stay the night. This I consented finally, and with some reluctance, to do, whereupon he departed at once to make a room ready for me. I took the opportunity thus afforded to examine his desk more closely for the *Necronomicon* missing from the library of Miskatonic University. It was not on his desk, but, crossing to the shelves, I found it there. I had just taken it down and was examining it to make cer-

tain of its identity, when Tuttle reentered the room. His quick eyes darted to the book in my hands, and he half smiled.

"I wish you'd take that back to Doctor Llanfer when you go in the morning, Haddon," he said casually. "Now that I've copied the text, I have no further use for it."

"I'll do that gladly," I said, relieved that the matter could so easily be settled.

Shortly after, I retired to the room on the second floor which he had prepared for me. He accompanied me as far as the door, and there paused briefly, uncertain of speech ready for his tongue and yet not permitted to pass his lips; for he turned once or twice, bade me good-night before he spoke what weighed upon his thoughts: "By the way—if you hear anything in the night, don't be alarmed, Haddon. Whatever it is, it's harmless—as yet."

It was not until he had gone and I was alone in my room that the significance of what he had said and the way he had said it dawned upon me. It grew upon me then that this was confirmation of the wild rumors that had penetrated Arkham, and that Tuttle spoke not entirely without fear. I undressed slowly and thoughtfully, and got into the pajamas Tuttle had laid out for me, without deviating for an instant from the preoccupation with the weird mythology of Amos Tuttle's ancient books that held my mind. Never quick to pass judgment, I was not prone to do so now; despite the apparent absurdity of the structure, it was still sufficiently well erected to merit more than a casual scrutiny. And it was clear to me that Tuttle was more than half convinced of its truth. This in itself was more than enough to give me pause, for Paul Tuttle had distinguished himself time and again for the thoroughness of his researches, and his published papers had not been challenged for even their most minor detail. As a result of facing these facts, I was prepared to admit at least that there was some basis for the mythology-structure outlined to me by Tuttle, but as to its truth or error, of course I was in no position at that time to commit myself even within the confines of my own mind; for once a man concedes or condemns a thing within his mind, it is doubly, nay triply, difficult to rid himself of his conclusion, however ill-advised it may subsequently prove to be.

Thinking thus, I got into bed, and lay there awaiting sleep. The night had deepened and darkened, though I could see through the flimsy curtain at the window that the stars were out, Andromeda high in the east, and the constellations of autumn beginning to mount the sky.

I WAS on the edge of sleep when I was startled awake again by a sound which had been present for some time, but which had only just then been borne in upon me with all its significance: the faintly trembling step of some gigantic creature vibrating all through the house, though the sound of it came not from within the house, but from the east, and for a confused moment I thought of something risen from the sea and walking along the shore in the wet sand.

But this illusion passed when I raised myself on one elbow and listened more intently. For a moment there was no sound whatever; then it came again, irregularly, broken—a step, a pause, two steps in fairly quick succession, an odd *sucking* noise. Disturbed, I got up and went to the open window. The night was warm, and the air still almost sul-

try; far to the northeast a beacon cut an arc upon the sky, and from the distant north came the faint drone of a night plane. It was already past midnight; low in the east shone red Aldebaran and the Pleiades, but I did not at that time, as I did later, connect the disturbances I heard to the appearance of the Hyades above the horizon.

The odd sounds, meanwhile, continued unabated, and it was borne in upon me presently that they were indeed approaching the house, however slow their progress. And that they came from the direction of the sea I could not doubt, for in this place there were no configurations of the earth that might have thrown any sound out of directional focus. I began to think again of those similar sounds we had heard while Amos Tuttle's body lay in the house, though I did not then remember that even as the Hyades lay now low in the east, so they were then setting in the west. If there were any difference in the manner of their approach, I was not able to ascertain it, unless it was that the present disturbances seemed somehow *closer,* but it was not a physical closeness as much as a *psychic closeness.* The conviction of this was so strong that I began to feel a growing uneasiness not untinged with fear; I began to experience a wild restlessness, a desire for company; and I went quickly to the door of my room, opened it, and stepped quietly into the hall in search of my host.

But now at once a new discovery made itself known. As long as I had been in my room, the sounds I had heard seemed unquestionably to come from the east, notwithstanding the faint, almost intangible tremors that seemed to shudder through the old house; but here in the darkness of the hall, whither I had gone without a light of any kind, I became aware that the sounds and tremblings alike emanated from *below*—not, indeed, from any place in the house, but below that—rising as if from subterranean places. My nervous tension increased, and I stood uneasily to get my bearings in the dark, when I perceived from the direction of the stairway a faint radiance mounting from below. I moved toward it at once, noiselessly, and, looking over the banister, saw that the light came from an electric candle held in Paul Tuttle's hand. He was standing in the lower hall, clad in his dressing-gown, though it was clear to me even from where I stood that he had not removed his clothes. The light that fell upon his face revealed the intensity of his attention; his head was cocked a little to one side in an attitude of listening, and he stood motionless the while I looked down upon him.

"Paul!" I called in a harsh whisper.

He looked up instantly and saw my face doubtless caught in the light from the candle in his hand. "Do you hear?" he asked.

"Yes—what in God's name is it?"

"I've heard it before," he said. "Come down."

I went down to the lower hall, where I stood for a moment under his penetrating and questioning gaze.

"You aren't afraid, Haddon?"

I shook my head.

"Then come with me."

He turned and led the way toward the back of the house, where he descended into the cellars below. All this time the sounds were rising in volume; it was as if they had approached closer to the house, indeed, almost as if they were directly below, and now there was obvious a definite trembling in the building, not alone of the walls and supports, but one with the shuddering and shak-

ing of the earth all around: it was as if some deep subterranean disturbance had chosen this spot in the earth's surface to make itself manifest. But Tuttle was unmoved by this, doubtless for the reason that he had experienced it before. He went directly through the first and second cellars to a third, set somewhat lower than the others, and apparently of more recent construction, but, like the first two, built of limestone blocks set in cement.

In the center of this sub-cellar he paused and stood quietly listening. The sounds had by this time risen to such intensity that it seemed as if the house were caught in a vortex of volcanic upheaval without actually suffering the destruction of its supports; for the trembling and shuddering, the creaking and groaning of the rafters above us gave evidence of the tremendous pressure exerted within the earth beneath us, and even the stone floor of the cellar seemed alive under my bare feet. But presently these sounds appeared to recede into the background, though actually they lessened not at all, and only presented this illusion because of our growing familiarity with them and because our ears were becoming attuned to other sounds in more major keys, these, too, rising from below as from a great distance, but carrying with them an insidious hellishness in the implications that grew upon us.

For the first whistling sounds were not clear enough to justify any guess as to their origin, and it was not until I had been listening for some time that it occurred to me that the sounds breaking into the weird whistling or whimpering derived from something alive, some sentient being, for presently they resolved into uncouth and shocking mouthings, indistinct and not intelligible even when they could be clearly heard. By this time, Tuttle had put the candle down, had come to his knees, and now half lay upon the floor with his ear close to the stone.

IN OBEDIENCE to his motion, I did likewise, and found that the sounds from below resolved into more recognizable syllables, though no less meaningless. For the first while, I heard nothing but incoherent and apparently unconnected ululations, with which were interpolated chanting sounds, which later I put down as follows: *Iä! Iä! ... Shub-Niggurath! ... Ugh! Cthulhu fhtagn! ... Iä! Iä! Cthulhu!*

But that I was in some error in regard to at least one of these sounds, I soon learned. *Cthulhu* itself was plainly audible, despite the fury of mounting sound all around; but the word that followed now seemed somewhat longer than *fhtagn;* it was as if an extra syllable had been added, and yet I could not be certain that it had not been there all the while, for presently it came clearer, and Tuttle took from a pocket his notebook and pencil and wrote:

"They are saying *Cthulhu naflfhtagn.*"

Judging by the expression of his eyes, faintly elated, this evidently conveyed something to him, but to me it meant nothing, apart from my ability to recognize a portion of it as identical in character with the words that appeared in the abhorred *R'lyeh Text,* and subsequently again in the magazine story, where its translation would seem to have indicated that the words meant: *Cthulhu waits dreaming.* My obvious blank ignorance of his meaning apparently recalled to my host that his philological learning was far in excess of mine, for he smiled bleakly and whispered, "It can be nothing else but a negative construction."

Even then I did not at once understand that he meant to explain that the subterranean voices were not saying what I had thought, but: *Cthulhu no longer waits dreaming!* There was now no longer any question of belief, for the things that were taking place were of no human origin, and admitted of no other solution than one in some way, however remotely, related to the incredible mythology Tuttle had so recently expounded to me. And now, as if this evidence of feeling and hearing were not enough, there became manifest a strange fetid smell mingled with a nauseatingly strong odor of fish, apparently seeping up through the porous limestone.

Tuttle became aware of this almost simultaneously with my own recognition, and I was alarmed to observe in his features traces of apprehension stronger than any I had heretofore noticed. He lay for a moment quietly; then he rose stealthily, took up the candle, and crept from the room, beckoning me after him.

Only when we were once more on the upper story did he venture to speak. "They are closer than I thought," he said then, musingly.

"Is it Hastur?" I asked nervously.

But he shook his head. "It cannot be he, because the passage below leads only to the sea and is doubtless partly full of water. Therefore it can only be one of the Water Beings—those who took refuge there when the torpedoes destroyed Devil Reef beyond shunned Innsmouth—Cthulhu, or those who serve him, as the Mi-Go serve in the icy fastnesses, and the Tcho-Tcho people serve on the hidden plateaus of Asia."

Since it was impossible to sleep, we sat for a time in the library, while Tuttle spoke in a half-chanting manner of the strange things he had come upon in the old books that had been his uncle's: sat waiting for the dawn while he told of the dreaded Plateau of Leng, of the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young, of Azathoth and Nyarlathotep, the Mighty Messenger who walked the star-spaces in the semblance of man; of the horrible and diabolic Yellow Sign, the haunted and fabled towers of mysterious Carcosa; of terrible Lloigor and hated Zhar; of the hellish monstrosity of the north country, Wind-Walker; of Ithaqua the Snow-Thing, of Chaugnar Faugn and N'gah-Kthun, of unknown Kadath and the Fungi from Yuggoth—so he talked for hours while the sounds below continued and I sat listening in a deadly, terror-fraught fear. And yet that fear was needless, for with the dawn the stars paled, and the tumult below died subtly away, fading toward the east and the ocean's deeps, and I went at last to my room, eagerly, to dress in preparation for my leave-taking.

4

In little over a month, I was again on my way to the Tuttle estate, via Arkham, in response to an urgent card from Paul, upon which he had scrawled in a shaky hand the single word: *Come!* Even if he had not written, I should have considered it my duty to return to the old house on the Aylesbury Road, despite my distaste for Tuttle's soul-shaking research and the now active fear I could not help but feel. Still, I had been holding off ever since coming to the decision that I should attempt to dissuade Tuttle from further research until the morning of the day on which his card came. On that morning I found in the *Transcript* a garbled story from Arkham; I would not have noticed it at all, had it not been for the

small head to take the eye: *Outrage in Arkham Cemetery,* and below: *Tuttle Vault Violated.* The story itself was brief, and disclosed little beyond the information already conveyed by the headings:

It was discovered here early this morning that vandals had broken into and partly destroyed the Tuttle vault in Arkham cemetery. One wall is smashed almost beyond repair, and the coffins have been disturbed. It has been reported that the coffin of the late Amos Tuttle is missing, but confirmation cannot be had by the time this issue goes to press.

Immediately upon reading this vague bulletin, I was seized with the strongest apprehension, come upon me from I know not what source; yet I felt at once that the outrage perpetrated upon the vault was not an ordinary crime, and I could not help connecting it in my mind with the occurrences at the old Tuttle house. I had therefore resolved to go to Arkham, and thence to see Paul Tuttle, before his card arrived; his brief message alarmed me still more, if possible, and at the same time convinced me of what I feared—that some revolting connection existed between the cemetery outrage and the things that walked in the earth beneath the house on Aylesbury Road. But at the same time I became aware of a deep reluctance to leave Boston, obsessed with an intangible fear of invisible danger from an unknown source. Still, duty compelled my going, and however strongly I might shun it, go I must.

I ARRIVED in Arkham in early afternoon and went at once to the cemetery, in my capacity as solicitor, to ascertain the extent of the damage done. A police guard had been established, but I was permitted to examine the premises as soon as my identity had been disclosed. The newspaper account, I found, had been shockingly inadequate, for the ruin of the Tuttle vault was virtually complete, its coffins exposed to the sun's warmth, some of them broken open, revealing long-dead bones. While it was true that Amos Tuttle's coffin had disappeared in the night, it had been found at midday in an open field about two miles east of Arkham, too far from the road to have been carried there; and the mystery of its being there was, if anything, deeper now than at the time the coffin had been found; for an investigation had disclosed certain deep indentations set at wide intervals in the earth, some of them as much as forty feet in diameter! It was as if some monstrous creature had walked there, though I confess that this thought occurred only within my own mind; the impressions in the earth remained a mystery upon which no light was thrown even by the wildest surmises as to their source. This may have been partly due to the more startling fact that had emerged immediately upon the finding of the coffin: the body of Amos Tuttle had vanished, and a search of the surrounding terrain had failed to disclose it. So much I learned from the custodian of the cemetery before I set out along the Aylesbury Road, refusing to think further about this incredible information until I had spoken with Paul Tuttle.

This time my summons at his door was not immediately answered, and I had begun to wonder with some apprehension whether something had happened to him, when I detected a faint scuffling sound beyond the door, and almost immediately heard Tuttle's muffled voice.

"Who is it?"

"Haddon," I replied, and heard what seemed to be a gasp of relief.

The door opened, and it was not un-

til it had closed that I became aware of the nocturnal darkness of the hall, and saw that the window at the far end had been tightly shuttered, and that no light fell into the long corridor from any of the rooms opening off it. I forbore to ask the question that came to my tongue and turned instead to Tuttle. It was some time before my eyes had mastered the unnatural darkness sufficiently to make him out, and then I was conscious of a distinct feeling of shock; for Tuttle had changed from a tall, upright man in his prime to a bent, heavy man of uncouth and faintly repulsive appearance, betraying an age which actually was not his. And his first words filled me with high alarm.

"Quick now, Haddon," he said. "There's not much time."

"What is it? What's wrong, Paul?" I asked.

He disregarded this, leading the way into the library, where an electric candle burned dimly. "I've made a packet of some of my uncle's most valuable books—the *R'lyeh Text, The Book of Eibon,* the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*—some others. These must go to the library of Miskatonic University by your hand today without fail. They are henceforth to be considered the property of the library. And here is an envelope containing certain instructions to you, in case I fail to get in touch with you either personally or by telephone—which I have had installed here since your last visit—by ten o'clock tonight. You are staying, I assume, at the Lewiston House. Now attend me closely: if I fail to telephone you to the contrary before ten o'clock tonight, you are to follow the instructions herein contained without hesitation. I advise you to act immediately, and, since you may feel them too unusual to proceed swiftly, I have already telephoned Judge Wilton and explained that I've left some strange but vital instructions with you, but that I want them carried out to the letter."

"What's happened, Paul?" I asked.

For a moment it seemed as if he would speak freely, but he only shook his head and said, "As yet I do not know all. But this much I can say: we have both, my uncle and I, made a terrible mistake. And I fear it is now too late to rectify it. You have learned of the disappearance of Uncle Amos's body?"

I nodded.

"It has since turned up."

I was astounded, since I had only just come from Arkham, and no such intelligence had been imparted to me. "Impossible!" I exclaimed. "They are still searching."

"Ah, no matter," he said oddly. "It is not there. It is here—at the foot of the garden, where it was abandoned when it was found useless."

At this, he jerked his head up suddenly, and we heard the shuffling and grunting sound that came from somewhere in the house. But in a moment it died away, and he turned again to me.

"The haven," he muttered, and gave a sickly laugh. "The tunnel was built by Uncle Amos, I am sure. But it was not the haven Hastur wanted—though it serves the minions of his half-brother, Great Cthulhu."

IT WAS almost impossible to realize that the sun shone outside, for the murkiness of the room and the atmosphere of impending dread that hung over me combined to lend to the scene an unreality apart from the world from which I had just come, despite the horror of the violated vault. I perceived also about Tuttle an air of almost feverish expectancy coupled with a nervous

haste; his eyes shone oddly and seemed more prominent than I had previously known them, his lips seemed to have coarsened and thickened, and his beard had become matted to a degree I would not have thought possible. He listened now only for a moment before he turned back to me.

"I myself need to stay for the present; I have not finished mining the place, and that must be done," he resumed erratically, but went on before the questions that rose in me could find utterance. "I've discovered that the house rests upon a naturally artificial foundation, that below the place there must be not only the tunnel, but a mass of cavernous structure, and I believe that these caverns are for the most part water-filled—and perhaps inhabited," he added as a sinister afterthought. "But this, of course, is at the present time of small importance. I have no immediate fear of what is below, but what I know is to come."

Once again he paused to listen, and again vague, distant sounds came to our ears. I listened intently, hearing an ominous fumbling, as if some creature were trying a door, and strove to discover or guess at its origin. I had thought at first that the sound emanated from somewhere within the house, thought almost instinctively of the attic; for it seemed to come from above, but in a moment it was borne in upon me that the sound did not derive from any place within the house, nor yet from any portion of the house outside, but grew from some place beyond that, from *a point in space beyond the walls of the house*—a fumbling, plucking noise which was not associated in my consciousness with any recognizable material sounds, but was rather an unearthly invasion. I peered at Tuttle, and saw that his attention was also for something from outside, for his head was somewhat lifted and his eyes looked beyond the enclosing walls, bearing in them a curiously rapt expression, not without fear, nor yet without a strange air of helpless waiting.

"That is Hastur's sign," he said in a hushed voice. "When the Hyades rise and Aldebaran stalks the sky tonight, He will come. The Other will be here with His water people, those of the primal gilled races." Then he began to laugh suddenly, soundlessly, and with a sly, half-mad glance, added, "And Cthulhu and Hastur shall struggle here for the haven while Great Orion strides above the horizon, with Betelguese where the Elder Gods are, the Ancient Ones, who alone can block the evil designs of these hellish spawn!"

My astonishment at his words doubtless showed in my face and in turn made him understand what shocked hesitation and doubt I felt, for abruptly his expression altered, his eyes softened, his hands clasped and unclasped nervously, and his voice became more natural.

"But perhaps this tires you, Haddon," he said. "I will say no more, for the time grows short, the evening approaches, and in a little while the night. I beg you to have no question about following the instructions I have outlined in this brief note for your eyes. I charge you to follow my directions implicitly. If it is as I fear, even that may be of no avail; if it is not, I shall reach you in time."

With that he picked up the packet of books, placed it in my hands, and led me to the door, whither I followed him without protest, for I was bewildered and not a little unmanned at the strangeness of his actions, the uncanny atmosphere of brooding horror that clung to the ancient, menace-ridden house.

At the threshold he paused briefly

and touched my arm lightly. "Goodbye, Haddon," he said with friendly intensity.

Then I found myself on the stoop in the glare of the lowering sunlight so bright that I closed my eyes against it until I could again accustom myself to its brilliance, while the cheerful chortle of a late bluebird on a fence-post across the road sounded pleasantly in my ears, as if to belie the atmosphere of dark fear and eldritch horror behind.

5

I COME now to that portion of my narrative upon which I am loath to embark, not alone because of the incredibility of what I must write, but because it can be at best a vague, uncertain account, replete with surmises and remarkable, if disjointed, evidence of horror-torn, eon-old evil beyond time, of primal things that lurk just outside the pale of life we know, of terrible, animate survival in the hidden places of Earth. How much of this Tuttle learned from those hellish texts he entrusted to my care for the locked shelves of Miskatonic University Library, I cannot say. Certain it is that he guessed many things he did not know until too late; of others, he gathered hints, though it is to be doubted that he fully comprehended the magnitude of the task upon which he so thoughtlessly embarked when he sought to learn why Amos Tuttle had willed the deliberate destruction of his house and books.

Following my return to Arkham's ancient streets, events succeeded events with undesirable rapidity. I deposited Tuttle's packet of books with Doctor Llanfer at the library, and made my way immediately after to Judge Wilton's house, where I was fortunate enough to find him. He was just sitting down to supper, and invited me to join him, which I did, though I had no appetite of any kind, indeed, food seeming repugnant to me. By this time all the fears and intangible doubts I had held had come to a head within me, and Wilton saw at once that I was laboring under an unusual nervous strain.

"Curious thing about the Tuttle vault, isn't it?" he ventured shrewdly, guessing at the reason for my presence in Arkham.

"Yes, but not half so curious as the circumstance of Amos Tuttle's body reposing at the foot of his garden," I replied.

"Indeed," said he without any visible sign of interest, his calmness serving to restore me in some measure to a sense of tranquillity. "I dare say you've come from there and know whereof you speak."

At that, I told him as briefly as possible the story I had come to tell, omitting only a few of the more improbable details, but not entirely succeeding in dismissing his doubts, though he was far too much a gentleman to permit me to feel them. He sat for a while in thoughtful silence after I had finished, glancing once or twice at the clock, which showed the hour to be already past seven. Presently he interrupted his revery to suggest that I telephone the Lewiston House and arrange for any call for me to be transferred to Judge Wilton's home. This I did instantly, somewhat relieved that he had consented to take the problem seriously enough to devote his evening to it.

"As for the mythology," he said, directly upon my return to the room, "it *can be* dismissed as the creation of a mad mind, the Arab Abdul Alhazred. I say advisedly, it *can be,* but in the light of the things which have happened in

Innsmouth, I should not like to commit myself. However, we are not at present in session. The immediate concern is for Paul Tuttle himself; I propose that we examine his instructions to you forthwith."

I PRODUCED the envelope at once, and opened it. It contained but a single sheet of paper, bearing these cryptic and ominous lines:

"I have mined the house and all. Go *immediately,* without delay, to the pasture gate west of the house, where in the shrubbery on the right side of the lane as you approach from Arkham, I have concealed the detonator. My Uncle Amos was right—it should have been done in the first place. If you fail me, Haddon, then before God you loose upon the countryside such a scourge as man has never known and will never see again—if indeed he survives it!"

Some inkling of the cataclysmic truth must at that moment have begun to penetrate my mind, for when Judge Wilton leaned back, looked at me quizzically, and asked, "What are you going to do?" I replied without hesitation: "I'm going to follow those instructions to the letter!"

He gazed at me for a moment without comment; then he bowed to the inevitable and settled back. "We shall wait for ten o'clock together," he said gravely.

The final act of the incredible horror that had its focal point in the Tuttle house took place just a little before ten, coming upon us in the beginning in so disarmingly prosaic a manner that the full horror, when it came, was doubly shocking and profound. For at five minutes to ten, the telephone rang. Judge Wilton took it at once, and even from where I sat I could hear the agonized voice of Paul Tuttle calling my name.

I took the telephone from Judge Wilton.

"This is Haddon," I said with a calmness I did not feel. "What is it, Paul?"

"Do it now!" he cried. "Oh, God, Haddon—right away—before . . . too late. Oh, God—the haven! *The haven!* . . . You know the place . . . pasture gate. Oh, God, be quick! . . ." And then there happened what I shall never forget: the sudden, terrible degeneration of his voice, so that it was as if it crumpled together and sank into abysmal mouthings; for the sounds that came over the wire were bestial and inhuman—shocking gibberings and crude, brutish, drooling sounds, from among which certain of them recurred again and again, and I listened in steadily mounting horror to the triumphant gibbering before it died away:

"Iä! Iä! Hastur! Ugh! Ugh! Iä! Hastur cf'ayak vulgtmm, vugtlagln vulgtmm! Ai! Shub-Niggurath! . . . Hastur—Hastur cf'tagn! Iä! Iä! Hastur! . . ."

Then abruptly all sound died away, and I turned to face Judge Wilton's terror-stricken features. And yet I did not see him, nor did I see anything in my understanding of what must be done; for abruptly, with cataclysmic effect, I understood what Tuttle had failed to know until too late. And at once I dropped the telephone; at once I ran hatless and coatless from the house into the street, with the sound of Judge Wilton frantically summoning police over the telephone fading into the night behind me. I ran with unnatural speed from the shadowed, haunted streets of witch-cursed Arkham into the October night, down the Aylesbury Road, into the lane and to the pasture gate, where

for one brief instant, while sirens blew behind me, I saw the Tuttle house through the orchard outlined in a hellish purple glow, beautiful but unearthly and tangibly evil.

Then I pushed down the detonator, and with a tremendous roar, the old house burst asunder, and flames leaped up where the house had stood.

FOR a few dazed moments I stood there, aware suddenly of the arrival of police along the road south of the house, before I began to move up to join them, and so saw that the explosion had brought about what Paul Tuttle had hinted: the collapse of the subterranean caverns below the house; for the land itself was settling, slipping down, and the flames that had risen were hissing and steaming in the water gushing up from below.

Then it was that that other thing happened—the last unearthly horror that mercifully blotted out what I saw in the wreckage jutting out above the rising waters—the great protoplasmic mass risen from the center of the lake forming where the Tuttle house had been, and the thing that came crying out at us across the lawn before it turned to face that other and begin a titanic struggle for mastery interrupted only by the brilliant explosion of light that seemed to emanate from the eastern sky like a bolt of incredibly powerful lightning: a tremendous discharge of energy in the shape of light, so that for one awful moment everything was revealed—before lightning-like appendages descended as from the heart of the blinding pillar of light itself, one seizing the mass in the waters, lifting it high, and casting it far out to sea, the other taking that second thing from the lawn and hurling it, a dark dwindling blot, into the sky, where it vanished among the eternal stars! And then came sudden, absolute, cosmic silence, and where, a moment before, this miracle of light had been, there was now only darkness and the line of trees against the sky, and low in the east the gleaming eye of Betelguese as Orion rose into the autumn night.

For an instant I did not know which was worse—the chaos of the previous moment, or the utter black silence of the present; but the small cries of horrified men brought it back to me, and it was borne in upon me then that they at least did not understand the secret horror, the final thing that sears and maddens, the thing that rises in the dark hours to stalk the bottomless depths of the mind. They may have heard, as I did, that thin, far, whistling sound, that maddening ululation from the deep, immeasurable gulf of cosmic space, the wailing that fell back along the wind, and the syllables that floated down the slopes of air: *Tekeli-li, tekeli-li, tekeli-li. . . .* And certainly they saw the thing that came crying out at us from the sinking ruins behind, the distorted caricature of a human being, with its eyes sunk to invisibility in thick masses of scaly flesh, the thing that flailed its arms bonelessly at us like the appendages of an octopus, *the thing that shrieked and gibbered in Paul Tuttle's voice!*

But they could not know the secret that I alone knew, the secret Amos Tuttle might have guessed in the shadows of his dying hours, the thing Paul Tuttle was too late in learning: *that the haven sought by Hastur the Unspeakable, the haven promised Him Who is not to be Named, was not the tunnel, and not the house, but the body and soul of Amos Tuttle himself, and, failing these, the living flesh and immortal soul of him who lived in that doomed house on the Aylesbury Road!*

"He was leaving Enid Mandifer, but he promised in his heart to return."

Fearful Rock

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

An eery tale of the American Civil War, and the uncanny evil being who called himself Persil Mandifer, and his lovely daughter— a tale of dark powers and weird happenings

The Story Thus Far

THE year is 1862, the place the Missouri-Arkansas border. Enid Mandifer is sent, cowed and semi-hypnotized, as a sacrifice to the Nameless One worshipped by her stepfather, Persil Mandifer. This mysterious deity, or demon, haunts an ancient house under the shadow of a natural pillar called Fearful Rock.

She encounters Lieutenant Kane

Lanark, scouting with a patrol of Union cavalry for Quantrill's Southern guerrillas. He brings her to the house, where his men have camped, and is puzzled and repelled when she tells what she knows of her stepfather's strange worship.

In the cellar a horned image is discovered. Sergeant Jager, a semi-fanatic, smashes it as diabolical. In the central hollow of the image Lanark finds a strange casket, which he cannot open. He hides it temporarily in a brick oven in the kitchen.

Persil Mandifer and his son Larue appear and protest the presence of the Union soldiers. When they find that Enid Mandifer had not gone through with the sacrifice of herself, they become violently abusive. Larue is shot down by Jager. At this moment the guerrillas charge the house. In the midst of a hand-to-hand battle, the house bursts into blue flame. Terrified, the guerrillas flee, having killed Persil Mandifer and several others.

When the dead are put in a common grave, the bodies of the two Mandifers are missing. Six dead guerrillas are interred together. Lanark, shaken by the mystery, bids farewell to Enid, promising to return when the war is over.

The story continues:

Part II

6. Return

It was spring again, the warm, bright spring of the year 1866, when Kane Lanark rode again into the Fearful Rock country.

His horse was a roan gray this time; the bay gelding had been shot under him, along with two other horses, during the hard-fought three days at Westport, the "Gettysburg of the West," when a few regulars and the Kansas militia turned back General Sterling Price's raid through Missouri. Lanark had been a captain then, and a major thereafter, leading a cavalry expedition into Kentucky. He narrowly missed being in at the finish of Quantrill, whose death by the hand of another he bitterly resented. Early in 1865 he was badly wounded in a skirmish with Confederate horsemen under General Basil Duke. Thereafter he could ride as well as ever, but when he walked he limped.

Lanark's uniform had been replaced by a soft hat and black frock coat, his face was browner and his mustache thicker, and his cheek bore the jaggedly healed scar of the guerrilla pistol-bullet. He was richer, too; the death of his older brother, Captain Douglas Lanark of the Confederate artillery, at Chancellorsville, had left him his father's only heir. Yet he was recognizable as the young lieutenant who had ridden into this district four years gone.

Approaching from the east instead of the north, he came upon the plain with its grass-levels, its clumps of bushes and trees, from another and lower point. Far away on the northward horizon rose a sharp little finger; that would be Fearful Rock, on top of which Trooper Newton had once died, horrified and unwounded. Now, then, which way would lie the house he sought for? He idled his roan along the trail, and encountered at last an aged, ragged Negro on a mule.

"Hello, uncle," Lanark greeted him, and they both reined up. "Which way is the Mandifer place?"

"Mandifuh?" repeated the slow, high voice of the old man. "Mandifuh, suh, cap'n? Ah doan know no Mandifuh."

"Nonsense, uncle," said Lanark, but without sharpness, for he liked Negroes. "The Mandifer family has lived around here for years. Didn't you ever know Mr. Persil Mandifer and his stepdaughter, Miss Enid?"

"Puhsil Mandifuh?" It was plain that the old fellow had heard and spoken the name before, else he would have stumbled over its unfamiliarities. "No, suh, cap'n. Ah doan nevah heah tella such gemman."

Lanark gazed past the mule and its tattered rider. "Isn't that a little house among those willows?"

The kinky head turned and peered. "Yes, suh, cap'n. Dat place b'long to Pahson Jaguh."

"Who?" demanded Lanark, almost standing up in his stirrups in his sudden interest. "Did you say Jager? What kind of man is he?"

"He jes a pahson—Yankee pahson," replied the Negro, a trifle nervous at this display of excitement. "Big man, suh, got red face. He Yankee. You ain' no Yankee, cap'n, suh. Whaffo you want Pahson Jaguh?"

"Never mind," said Lanark, and thrust a silver quarter into the withered brown palm. He also handed over one of his long, fragrant cheroots. "Thanks, uncle," he added briskly, then spurred his horse and rode on past.

Reaching the patch of willows, he found that the trees formed an open curve that faced the road, and that within this curve stood a rough but snug-looking cabin, built of sawn, unpainted planks and home-split shingles. Among the brush to the rear stood a smaller shed, apparently a stable, and a pen for chickens or a pig. Lanark reined up in front, swung out of his saddle, and tethered his horse to a thorny shrub at the trail-side. As he drew tight the knot of the halter-rope, the door of heavy boards opened with a creak. His old sergeant stepped into view.

Jager was a few pounds heavier, if anything, than when Lanark had last seen him. His hair was longer, and his beard had grown to the center of his broad chest. He wore blue jeans tucked into worn old cavalry boots, a collarless checked shirt fastened with big brass studs, and leather suspenders. He stared somewhat blankly as Lanark called him by name and walked up to the doorstep, favoring his injured leg.

"It's Captain Lanark, isn't it?" Jager hazarded. "My eyes——" He paused, fished in a hip pocket and produced steel-rimmed spectacles. When he donned them, they appeared to aid his vision. "Indeed it is Captain Lanark! Or Major Lanark—yes, you were promoted——"

"I'm Mr. Lanark now," smiled back the visitor. "The war's over, Jager. Only this minute did I hear of you in the country. How does it happen that you settled in this place?"

"Come in, sir." Jager pushed the door wide open, and ushered Lanark into an unfinished front room, well lighted by windows on three sides. "It's not a strange story," he went on as he brought forward a well-mended wooden chair for the guest, and himself sat on a small keg. "You will remember, sir, that the land hereabouts is under a most unhallowed influence. When the war came to an end, I felt strong upon me the call to another conflict—a crusade against evil." He turned up his eyes, as though to subpena the powers of heaven as witnesses to his devotion. "I preach here, the gospels and the true godly life."

"What is your denomination?" asked Lanark.

Jager coughed, as though abashed. "To my sorrow, I am ordained of no

church; yet might this not be part of heaven's plan? I may be here to lead a strong new movement against hell's legions."

LANARK nodded as though to agree with this surmise, and studied Jager anew. There was nothing left in manner or speech to suggest that here had been a fierce fighter and model soldier, but the old rude power was not gone. Lanark then asked about the community, and learned that there were but seven white families within a twenty-mile radius. To these Jager habitually preached of a Sunday morning, at one farm home or another, and in the afternoon he was wont to exhort the more numerous Negroes.

Lanark had by now the opening for his important question. "What about the Mandifer place? Remember the girl we met, and her stepfather?"

"Enid Mandifer!" breathed Jager huskily, and his right hand fluttered up. Lanark remembered that Jager had once assured him that not only Catholics warded off evil with the sign of the cross.

"Yes, Enid Mandifer." Lanark leaned forward. "Long ago, Jager, I made a promise that I would come and make sure that she prospered. Just now I met an old Negro who swore that he had never heard the name."

Jager began to talk, steadily but with a sort of breathless awe, about what went on in the Fearful Rock country. It was not merely that men died—the death of men was not sufficient to horrify folk around whom a war had raged. But corpses, when found, held grimaces that nobody cared to look upon, and no blood remained in their bodies. Cattle, too, had been slain, mangled dreadfully—perhaps by the strange, unidentifiable creatures that prowled by moonlight and chattered in voices that sounded human. One farmer of the vicinity, who had ridden with Quantrill, had twice met strollers after dusk, and had recognized them for comrades whom he knew to be dead.

"And the center of this devil's business," concluded Jager, "is the farm that belonged to Persil Mandifer." He drew a deep, tired-sounding breath. "As the desert and the habitation of dragons, so is it with that farm. No trees live, and no grass. From a distance, one can see a woman. It is Enid Mandifer."

"Where is the place?" asked Lanark directly.

Jager looked at him for long moments without answering. When he did speak, it was an effort to change the subject. "You will eat here with me at noon," he said. "I have a Negro servant, and he is a good cook."

"I ate a very late breakfast at a farmhouse east of here," Lanark put him off. Then he repeated, "Where is the Mandifer place?"

"Let me speak this once," Jager temporized. "As you have said, we are no longer at war—no longer officer and man. We are equals, and I am able to refuse to guide you."

Lanark got up from his chair. "That is true, but you will not be acting the part of a friend."

"I will tell you the way, on one condition." Jager's eyes and voice pleaded. "Say that you will return to this house for supper and a bed, and that you will be within my door by sundown."

"All right," said Lanark. "I agree. Now, which way does that farm lie?"

Jager led him to the door. He pointed. "This trail joins a road beyond, an old road that is seldom used. Turn north upon it, and you will come to a part which is grown up in weeds.

Nobody passes that way. Follow on until you find an old house, built low, with the earth dry and bare around it. That is the dwelling-place of Enid Mandifer."

Lanark found himself biting his lip. He started to step across the threshold, but Jager put a detaining hand on his arm. "Carry this as you go."

He was holding out a little book with a gray paper cover. It had seen usage and trouble since last Lanark had noticed it in Jager's hands; its back was mended with a pasted strip of dark cloth, and its edges were frayed and gnawed-looking, as though rats had been at it. But the front cover still said plainly:

John George Hohman's
POW-WOWS
Or
LONG LOST FRIEND

"Carry this," said Jager again, and then quoted glibly: "'Whoever carries this book with him is safe from all his enemies, visible or invisible; and whoever has this book with him cannot die without the holy corpse of Jesus Christ, nor drown in any water, nor burn up in any fire, nor can any unjust sentence be passed upon him.'"

Lanark grinned in spite of himself and his new concern. "Is this the kind of a protection that a minister of God should offer me?" he inquired, half jokingly.

"I have told you long ago that the *Long Lost Friend* is a good book, and a blessed one." Jager thrust it into Lanark's right-hand coat pocket. His guest let it remain, and held out his own hand in friendly termination of the visit.

"Good-bye," said Lanark. "I'll come back before sundown, if that will please you."

He limped out to his horse, untied it and mounted. Then, following Jager's instructions, he rode forward until he reached the old road, turned north and proceeded past the point where weeds had covered the unused surface. Before the sun had fallen far in the sky, he was come to his destination.

It was a squat, spacious house, the bricks of its trimming weathered and the dark brown paint of its timbers beginning to crack. Behind it stood unrepaired stables, seemingly empty. In the yard stood what had been wide-branched trees, now leafless and lean as skeleton paws held up to a relentless heaven. And there was no grass. The earth was utterly sterile and hard, as though rain had not fallen since the beginning of time.

Enid Mandifer had been watching him from the open door. When she saw that his eyes had found her, she called him by name.

7. The Rock Again

THEN there was silence. Lanark sat his tired roan and gazed at Enid, rather hungrily, but only a segment of his attention was for her. The silence crowded in upon him. His unconscious awareness grew conscious—conscious of that blunt, pure absence of sound. There was no twitter of birds, no hum of insects. Not a breath of wind stirred in the leafless branches of the trees. Not even echoes came from afar. The air was dead, as water is dead in a still, stale pond.

He dismounted then, and the creak of his saddle and the scrape of his boot-sole upon the bald earth came sharp and shocking to his quiet-filled ears. A hitching-rail stood there, old-seeming to be in so new a country as this. Lanark tethered his horse, pausing to touch

its nose reassuringly—it, too, felt uneasy in the thick silence. Then he limped up a gravel-faced path and stepped upon a porch that rang to his feet like a great drum.

Enid Mandifer came through the door and closed it behind her. Plainly she did not want him to come inside. She was dressed in brown alpaca, high-necked, long-sleeved, tight above the waist and voluminous below. Otherwise she looked exactly as she had looked when she bade him good-bye beside the ravine, even to the strained, sleepless look that made sorrowful her fine oval face.

"Here I am," said Lanark. "I promised that I'd come, you remember."

She was gazing into his eyes, as though she hoped to discover something there. "You came," she replied, "because you could not rest in another part of the country."

"That's right," he nodded, and smiled, but she did not smile back.

"We are doomed, all of us," she went on, in a low voice. "Mr. Jager—the big man who was one of your soldiers——"

"I know. He lives not far from here."

"Yes. He, too, had to return. And I live—here." She lifted her hands a trifle, in hopeless inclusion of the dreary scene. "I wonder why I do not run away, or why, remaining, I do not go mad. But I do neither."

"Tell me," he urged, and touched her elbow. She let him take her arm and lead her from the porch into the yard that was like a surface of tile. The spring sun comforted them, and he knew that it had been cold, so near to the closed front door of Persil Mandifer's old house.

She moved with him to a little rustic bench under one of the dead trees. Still holding her by the arm, he could feel at the tips of his fingers the shock of her footfalls, as though she trod stiffly. She, in turn, quite evidently was aware of his limp, and felt distress; but, tactfully, she did not inquire about it. When they sat down together, she spoke.

"When I came home that day," she began, "I made a hunt through all of my stepfather's desks and cupboards. I found many papers, but nothing that told me of the things that so shocked us both. I did find money, a small chest filled with French and American gold coins. In the evening I called the slaves together and told them that their master and his son were dead.

"Next morning, when I wakened, I found that every slave had run off, except one old woman. She, nearly a hundred years old and very feeble, told me that fear had come to them in the night, and that they had run like rabbits. With them had gone the horses, and all but one cow."

"They deserted you!" cried Lanark hotly.

"If they truly felt the fear that came here to make its dwelling-place!" Enid Mandifer smiled sadly, as if in forgiveness of the fugitives. "But to resume; the old aunty and I made out here somehow. The war went on, but it seemed far away; and indeed it was far away. We watched the grass die before June, the leaves fall, the beauty of this place vanish."

"I am wondering about that death of grass and leaves," put in Lanark. "You connect it, somehow, with the unholiness at Fearful Rock; yet things grow there."

"Nobody is being punished there," she reminded succinctly. "Well, we had the chickens and the cow, but no crops would grow. If they had, we needed hands to farm them. Last win-

ter aunty died, too. I buried her myself, in the back yard."

"With nobody to help you?"

"I found out that nobody cared or dared to help." Enid said that very slowly, and did not elaborate upon it. "One Negro, who lives down the road a mile, has had some mercy. When I need anything, I carry one of my gold pieces to him. He buys for me, and in a day or so I seek him out and get whatever it is. He keeps the change for his trouble."

Lanark, who had thought it cold upon the porch of the house, now mopped his brow as though it were a day in August. "You must leave here," he said.

"I have no place to go," she replied, "and if I had I would not dare."

"You would not dare?" he echoed uncomprehendingly.

"I must tell you something else. It is that my stepfather and Larue—his son—are still here."

"What do you mean? They were killed," Lanark protested. "I saw them fall. I myself examined their bodies."

"They were killed, yes. But they are here, perhaps within earshot."

It was his turn to gaze searchingly into her eyes. He looked for madness, but he found none. She was apparently sane and truthful.

"I do not see them," she was saying, "or, at most, I see only their sliding shadows in the evening. But I know of them, just around a corner or behind a chair. Have you never known and recognized someone just behind you, before you looked? Sometimes they sneer or smile. Have you," she asked, "ever felt someone smiling at you, even though you could not see him?"

Lanark knew what she meant. "But stop and think," he urged, trying to hearten her, "that nothing has happened to you—nothing too dreadful—although so much was promised when you failed to go through with that ceremony."

She smiled, very thinly. "You think that nothing has happened to me? You do not know the curse of living here, alone and haunted. You do not understand the sense I have of something tightening and thickening about me; tightening and thickening inside of me, too." Her hand touched her breast, and trembled. "I have said that I have not gone mad. That does not mean that I shall never go mad."

"Do not be resigned to any such idea," said Lanark, almost roughly, so earnest was he in trying to win her from the thought.

"Madness may come—in the good time of those who may wish it. My mind will die. And things will feed upon it, as buzzards would feed upon my dead body."

HER thin smile faded away. Lanark felt his throat growing as dry as lime, and cleared it noisily. Silence was still dense around them. He asked her, quite formally, what she found to do.

"My stepfather had many books, most of them old," was her answer. "At night I light one lamp—I must husband my oil—and sit well within its circle of light. Nothing ever comes into that circle. And I read books. Every night I read also a chapter from a Bible that belonged to my old aunty. When I sleep, I hold that Bible against my heart."

He rose nervously, and she rose with him. "Must you go so soon?" she asked, like a courteous hostess.

Lanark bit his mustache. "Enid Mandifer, come out of here with me."

"I can't."

"You can. You shall. My horse will carry both of us."

She shook her head, and the smile was back, sad and tender this time. "Perhaps you cannot understand, and I know that I cannot tell you. But if I stay here, the evil stays here with me. If I go, it will follow and infect the world. Go away alone."

She meant it, and he did not know what to say or do.

"I shall go," he agreed finally, with an air of bafflement, "but I shall be back."

Suddenly he kissed her. Then he turned and limped rapidly away, raging at the feeling of defeat that had him by the back of the neck. Then, as he reached his horse he found himself glad to be leaving the spot, even though Enid Mandifer remained behind, alone. He cursed with a vehemence that made the roan flinch, untied the halter and mounted. Away he rode, to the magnified clatter of hoofs. He looked back, not once but several times. Each time he saw Enid Mandifer, smaller and smaller, standing beside the bench under the naked tree. She was gazing, not along the road after him, but at the spot where he had mounted his horse. It was as though he had vanished from her sight at that point.

Lanark damned himself as one who retreated before an enemy, but he felt that it was not as simple as that. Helplessness, not fear, had routed him. He was leaving Enid Mandifer, but again he promised in his heart to return.

Somewhere along the weed-teemed road, the silence fell from him like a heavy garment slipping away, and the world hummed and sighed again.

After some time he drew rein and fumbled in his saddlebag. He had lied to Jager about his late breakfast, and now he was grown hungry. His fingers touched and drew out two hardtacks—they were plentiful and cheap, so recently was the war finished and the army demobilized—and a bit of raw bacon. He sandwiched the streaky smoked flesh between the big square crackers and ate without dismounting. Often, he considered, he had been content with worse fare. Then his thoughts went to the place he had quitted, the girl he had left there. Finally he skimmed the horizon with his eye.

To north and east he saw the spire of Fearful Rock, like a dark threatening finger lifted against him. The challenge of it was too much to ignore.

He turned his horse off the road and headed in that direction. It was a longer journey than he had thought, perhaps because he had to ride slowly through some dark swamp-ground with a smell of rotten grass about it. When he came near enough, he slanted his course to the east, and so came to the point from which he first approached the rock and the house that had then stood in its shadow.

A crow flapped overhead, cawing lonesomely. Lanark's horse seemed to falter in its stride, as though it had seen a snake on the path, and he had to spur it along toward its destination. He could make out the inequalities of the rock, as clearly as though they had been sketched in with a pen, and the new spring greenery of the brush and trees in the gulley beyond to the westward; but the tumbledown ruins of the house were somehow blurred, as though a gray mist or cloud hung there.

Lanark wished that his old command rode with him, at least that he had coaxed Jager along; but he was close to the spot now, and would go in, however uneasily, for a closer look.

The roan stopped suddenly, and Lanark's spur made it sidle without advanc-

ing. He scolded it in an undertone, slid out of the saddle and threaded his left arm through the reins. Pulling the beast along, he limped toward the spot where the house had once stood.

The sun seemed to be going down.

8. The Grapple by the Grave

LANARK stumped for a furlong or more, to the yard of the old house, and the horse followed unwillingly—so unwillingly that had there been a tree or a stump at hand, Lanark would have tethered and left it. When he paused at last, under the lee of the great natural obelisk that was Fearful Rock, the twilight was upon him. Yet he could see pretty plainly the collapsed, blackened ruins of the dwelling that four years gone had burned before his eyes in devil-blue flame.

He came close to the brink of the foundation-hollow, and gazed narrowly into it. Part of the chimney still stood, broken off at about a level with the surface of the ground, the rubbish that had been its upper part lying in jagged heaps about its base. Chill seemed to rise from that littered depression, something like the chill he had guessed at rather than felt when he had faced Enid Mandifer upon her porch. The chill came slowly, almost stealthily, about his legs and thighs, creeping snake-like under his clothing to tingle the skin upon his belly. He shuddered despite himself, and the roan nuzzled his shoulder in sympathy. Lanark lifted a hand and stroked the beast's cheek, then moved back from where the house had stood.

He gazed westward, in the direction of the gulley. There, midway between the foundation-hollow and the natural one, was a much smaller opening in the earth, a pit filled with shadow. He remembered ordering a grave dug there, a grave for twelve men. Well, it seemed to be open now, or partially open.

He plodded toward it, reached it and gazed down in the fading light. He judged that the dead of his own command still lay where their comrades had put them, in a close row of six toward the east. It was the westward end of the trench that had been dug up, the place where the guerrillas had been laid. Perhaps the burial had been spied upon, and the Southerners had returned to recover their fallen friends.

Yet there was something below there, something pallid and flabby-looking. Lanark had come to make sure of things, and he stooped, then climbed down, favoring his old wound. It was darker in the ditch than above; yet he judged by the looseness of earth under his feet that in one spot, at least, there had been fresh digging—or, perhaps, some other person walking and examining. And the pallid patch was in reality two pallid patches, like discarded cloaks or jackets. Still holding the end of his horse's bridle, he put down his free hand to investigate.

Human hair tickled his fingers, and he snatched them back with an exclamation. Then he dug in his pocket, brought out a match, and snapped it aglow on the edge of his thumbnail.

He gazed downward for a full second before he dropped the light. It went out before it touched the bottom of the hole. But Lanark had seen enough.

Two human skins lay there—white, empty human skins. The legs of them sprawled like discarded court stockings, the hands of them like forgotten gauntlets. And tousled hair covered the collapsed heads of them. . . .

He felt light-headed and sick. Frantically he struggled up out of that grave,

and barely had he come to his knees on the ground above, when his horse snorted and jerked its bridle free from his grasp. Lanark sprang up, tingling all over. Across the trench, black and broad, stood a human—or semi-human—figure.

Lanark felt a certain draining cold at cheek and brow. Yet his voice was steady as he spoke, challengingly:

"What do you want?"

The creature opposite stooped, then bent its thick legs. It was going to jump across the ditch. Lanark took a quick backward step toward his horse—an old Colt's revolver was tucked into his right saddlebag.

But the sudden move on his part was too much for the jangled nerves of the beast. It whickered, squealed, and jerked around. A moment later it bolted away toward the east.

At the same time, the form on the other side of the open grave lunged forward, cleared the space, and came at Lanark.

But it was attacking one who had been in close fights before, and emerged the victor. Lanark, though partially a cripple, had lost nothing of a cavalryman's toughness and resolution. He sprang backward, let his assailant's charge slow before it reached him, then lashed out with his left fist. His gloved knuckles touched soft flesh at what seemed to be the side of the face, flesh that gave under them. Lanark brought over his right, missed with it, and fell violently against the body of the other. For a moment he smelled corruption, and then found his feet and retreated again.

The black shape drew itself stoopingly down, as though to muster and concentrate its volume of vigor. It launched itself at Lanark's legs, with two arms extended. The veteran tried to dodge again, this time sidewise, but his lameness made him slow. Hands reached and fastened upon him, one clutching his thigh, the other clawing at the left-hand pocket of his coat.

But in the moment of capture, the foul-smelling thing seemed to shudder and snatch itself away, as though the touch of Lanark had burned it. A moan came from somewhere in its direction. The crouched body straightened, the arms lifted in cringing protection of the face. Lanark, mystified but desperately glad, himself advanced to the attack. As he came close he threw his weight. It bowled the other backward and over, and he fell hard upon it. His own hands, sinewy and sure, groped quickly upon dank, sticky-seeming garments, found a rumpled collar and then a throat.

That throat appeared to be muddy, or at any rate slippery and foul. With an effort Lanark sank his fingertips into it, throttling grimly and with honest intention to kill. There was no resistance, only a quivering of the body under his knee. The arms that screened the face fell quivering away to either side. At that moment a bright moon shimmered from behind a passing veil of cloud. Lanark gazed down into the face of his enemy.

A puffy, livid, filth-clotted face—but he knew it. Those spiked mustaches, those bulging eyes, the shape, contour and complexion. . . .

"You're one of Quantrill's——" accused Lanark between clenched teeth. Then his voice blocked itself, and his hands jerked away from their strangle hold. His mouth gaped open.

"I killed you once!" he cried.

Between him and the body he had pinned down there drifted a wild whirl of vision. He saw again the fight in

the blue fireglow, the assailant who spurred against him, the flash of his own revolver, the limp collapse of the other. He saw, too, the burial next morning—blue-coated troopers shoveling loam down upon a silent row of figures; and, ere clods hid it, a face peeping through a disarranged blanket, a face with staring eyes and mustaches like twin knife-points.

Then his eyes were clear again, and he was on his feet and running. His stiff leg gave him pain, but he slackened speed no whit. Once he looked back. A strange blueness, like a dim reflection of the fire long ago, hung around the base of Fearful Rock. In the midst of it, he saw not one but several figures. They were not moving—not walking, anyway—but he could swear that they gazed after him.

Something tripped him, a root or a fallen branch. He rose, neither quickly nor confidently, aching in all his limbs. The moon had come up, he took time to realize. Then he suddenly turned dizzy and faint all over, as never in any battle he had seen, not even Pea Ridge and Westport; for something bulky and dark was moving toward and against him.

Then it whinnied softly, and his heart stole down from his throat—it was his runaway horse.

Lanark was fain to stand for long seconds, with his arm across the saddle, before he mounted. Then he turned the animal's head southward and shook the bridle to make it walk. At last he was able to examine himself for injuries.

Though winded, he was not bruised or hurt, but he was covered with earth and mold, and his side pocket had been almost ripped from his coat. That had happened when the—the creature yonder had tried to grapple him. He wondered how it had been forced to retreat so suddenly. He put his hand in the pocket.

He touched a little book there, and drew it forth.

It was Jager's *Long Lost Friend.*

A good hour later, Lanark rode into the yard of his ex-sergeant. The moon was high, and Jager was sitting upon the front stoop.

Silently the owner of the little house rose, took Lanark's bridle rein and held the horse while Lanark dismounted. Then he led the beast around to the rear yard, where the little shed stood. In front of this he helped Lanark unbridle and unsaddle the roan.

A Negro boy appeared, diffident in his mute offer of help, and Jager directed him to rub the beast down with a wisp of hay before giving it water or grain. Then he led Lanark to the front of the house.

Jager spoke at the threshold: "I thank God you are come back safely."

9. Debate and Decision

JAGER'S Negro servant was quite as good a cook as promised. Lanark, eating chicken stew and biscuits, reflected that only twice before had he been so ravenous—upon receiving the news of Lee's surrender at Appomatox, and after the funeral of his mother. When he had finished, he drew forth a cheroot. His hand shook as he lighted it. Jager gave him one of the old looks of respectful disapproval, but did not comment. Instead he led Lanark to the most comfortable chair in the parlor and seated himself upon the keg. Then he said: "Tell me."

Lanark told him, rather less coherently than here set down, the adventures of the evening. Again and again he groped in his mind for explanations, but not once found any to offer.

"It is fit for the devil," pronounced Jager when his old commander had finished. "Did I not say that you should have stayed away from that woman? You're well out of the business."

"I'm well into it, you mean," Lanark fairly snapped back. "What can you think of me, Jager, when you suggest that I might let things stand as they are?"

The frontier preacher massaged his shaggy jowl with thoughtful knuckles. "You have been a man of war and an officer of death," he said heavily. "God taught your hands to fight. Yet your enemies are not those who perish by the sword." He held out his hand. "You say you still have the book I lent you?"

From his torn pocket Lanark drew Hohman's *Long Lost Friend*. Jager took it and stared at the cover. "The marks of fingers," he muttered, in something like awe. He examined the smudges closely, putting on his spectacles to do so, then lifted the book to his nose. His nostrils wrinkled, as if in distaste, and he passed the thing back. "Smell it," he directed.

Lanark did so. About the slimy-looking prints on the cover hung a sickening odor of decayed flesh.

"The demon that attacked you, that touched this book, died long ago," went on Jager. "You know as much—you killed him with your own hand. Yet he fights you this very night."

"Maybe you have a suggestion," Lanark flung out, impatient at the assured and almost snobbish air of mystery that colored the manner of his old comrade in arms. "If this is a piece of hell broke loose, perhaps you did the breaking. Remember that image—that idol-thing with horns—that you smashed in the cellar? You probably freed all the evil upon the world when you did that."

Jager frowned, but pursued his lecture. "This very book, this *Long Lost Friend*, saved you from the demon's clutch," he said. "It is a notable talisman and shield. But with the shield one must have a sword, with which to attack in turn."

"All right," challenged Lanark. "Where is your sword?"

"It is a product of a mighty pen," Jager informed him sententiously. He turned in his seat and drew from a box against the wall a book. Like the *Long Lost Friend*, it was bound in paper, but of a cream color. Its title stood forth in bold black letters:

THE SECRETS
OF
ALBERTUS MAGNUS

"A translation from the German and the Latin," explained Jager. "Printed, I think, in New York. This book is full of wisdom, although I wonder if it is evil, unlawful wisdom."

"I don't care if it is." Lanark almost snatched the book. "Any weapon must be used. And I doubt if Albertus Magnus was evil. Wasn't he a churchman, and didn't he teach Saint Thomas Aquinas?" He leafed through the beginning of the book. "Here's a charm, Jager, to be spoken in the name of God. That doesn't sound unholy."

"Satan can recite scripture to his own ends," misquoted Jager. "I don't remember who said that, but——"

"Shakespeare said it, or something very like it," Lanark informed him. "Look here, Jager, farther on. Here's a spell against witchcraft and evil spirits."

"I have counted at least thirty such in that book," responded the other. "Are you coming to believe in them, sir?"

Lanark looked up from the page.

His face was earnest and, in a way, humble.

"I'm constrained to believe in many unbelievable things. If my experience tonight truly befell me, then I must believe in charms of safety. Supernatural evil like that must have its contrary supernatural good."

Jager pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and smiled in his beard. "I have heard it told," he said, "that charms and spells work only when one believes in them."

"You sound confident of that, at least," Lanark smiled back. "Maybe you will help me, after all."

"Maybe I will."

The two gazed into each other's eyes, and then their hands came out, at the same moment. Lanark's lean fingers crushed Jager's coarser ones.

"Let's be gone," urged Lanark at once, but the preacher shook his head emphatically.

"Slowly, slowly," he temporized. "Cool your spirit, and take council. He that ruleth his temper is greater than he that taketh a city." Once more he put out his hand for the cream-colored volume of Albertus Magnus, and began to search through it.

"Do you think to comfort me from that book?" asked Lanark.

"It has more than comfort," Jager assured him. "It has guidance." He found what he was looking for, pulled down his spectacles again, and read aloud:

"'Two wicked eyes have overshadowed me, but three other eyes are overshadowing me—the one of God the Father, the second of God the Son, the third of God the Holy Spirit; they watch my body and soul, my blood and bone; I shall be protected in the name of God.'"

His voice was that of a prayerful man reading Scripture, and Lanark felt moved despite himself. Jager closed the book gently and kept it in his hand.

"Albertus Magnus has many such charms and assurances," he volunteered. "In this small book, less than two hundred pages, I find a score and more of ways for punishing and thwarting evil spirits, or those who summon evil spirits." He shook his head, as if in sudden wrath, and turned up his spectacled eyes. "O Lord!" he muttered. "How long must devils plague us for our sins?"

Growing calmer once more, he read again from the book of Albertus Magnus. There was a recipe for invisibility, which involved the making of a thumbstall from the ear of a black cat boiled in the milk of a black cow; an invocation to "Bedgoblin and all ye evil spirits"; several strange rituals, similar to those Lanark remembered from the *Long Lost Friend*, to render one immune to wounds received in battle; and a rime to speak while cutting and preparing a forked stick of hazel to use in hunting for water or treasure. As a boy, Lanark had once seen water "witched," and now he wondered if the rod-bearer had gained his knowledge from Albertus Magnus.

"'Take an earthen pot, not glazed,'" Jager was reading on, "'and yarn spun by a girl not seven years old'——"

HE BROKE off abruptly, with a little inarticulate gasp. The book slammed shut between his hands. His eyes were bright and hot, and his face pale to the roots of his beard. When he spoke, it was in a hoarse whisper:

"That was a spell to control witches, in the name of Lucifer, king of hell. Didn't I say that this book was evil?"

"You must forget that," Lanark counseled him soberly. "I will admit

that the book might cause sorrow and wickedness, if it were in wicked hands; but I do not think that you are anything but a good man."

"Thank you," said Jager simply. He rose and went to his table, then returned with an iron inkpot and a stump of a pen. "Let me have your right hand."

Lanark held out his palm, as though to a fortune-teller. Upon the skin Jager traced slowly, in heavy capital letters, a square of five words:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

Under this, very boldly, three crosses:

X X X

"A charm," the preacher told Lanark as he labored with the pen. "These mystic words and the crosses will defend you in your slumber, from all wicked spirits. So says Albertus Magnus, and Hohman as well."

"What do they mean?"

"I do not know that." Jager blew hotly upon Lanark's palm to dry the ink. "Will you now write the same thing for me, in my right hand?"

"If you wish." Lanark, in turn, dipped in the inkpot and and began to copy the diagram. "*Opera* is a word I know," he observed, "and *tenet* is another. *Sator* may be some form of the old pagan word, *satyr*—a kind of horned human monster——"

He finished the work in silence. Then he lighted another cigar. His hand was as steady as a gun-rest this time, and the match did not even flicker in his fingertips. He felt somehow stronger, better, more confident.

"You'll give me a place to sleep for the night?" he suggested.

"Yes. I have only pallets, but you and I have slept on harder couches before this."

Within half an hour both men were sound asleep.

10. Enid Mandifer Again

THE silence was not so deadly the following noon as Lanark and Jager dismounted at the hitching-rack in front of Enid Mandifer's; perhaps this was because there were two horses to stamp and snort, two bridles to jingle, two saddles to creak, two pairs of boots to spurn the pathway toward the door.

Enid Mandifer, with a home-sewn sunbonnet of calico upon her head, came around the side of the house just as the two men were about to step upon the porch. She called out to them, anxiously polite, and stood with one hand clutched upon her wide skirt of brown alpaca.

"Mr. Lanark," she ventured, "I hoped that you would come again. I have something to show you."

It was Jager who spoke in reply: "Miss Mandifer, perhaps you may remember me. I'm Parson Jager, I live south of here. Look." He held out something—the *Long Lost Friend* book. "Did you ever see anything of this sort?"

She took it without hesitation, gazing interestedly at the cover. Lanark saw her soft pink lips move, silently framing the odd words of the title. Then she opened it and studied the first page. After a moment she turned several leaves, and a little frown of perplexity touched her bonnet-shaded brow. "These are receipts—recipes—of some kind," she said slowly. "Why do you show them to me, Mr. Jager?"

The ex-sergeant had been watching her closely, his hands upon his heavy hips, his beard thrust forward and his head tilted back. He put forth his hand and received back the *Long Lost Friend*.

"Excuse me, Miss Mandifer, if I have suspected you unjustly," he said, handsomely if cryptically. Then he glanced sidewise at Lanark, as though to refresh a memory that needed no refreshing—a memory of a living-dead horror that had recoiled at very touch of the little volume.

Enid Mandifer was speaking once more: "Mr. Lanark, I had a dreadful night after you left. Dreams . . . or maybe not dreams. I felt things come and stand by my bed. This morning, on a bit of paper that lay on the floor——"

From a pocket in the folds of her skirt, she produced a white scrap. Lanark accepted it from her. Jager came close to look.

"Writing," growled Jager. "In what language is that?"

"It's English," pronounced Lanark, "but set down backward—from right to left, as Leonardo da Vinci wrote."

The young woman nodded eagerly at this, as though to say that she had already seen as much.

"Have you a mirror?" Jager asked her, then came to a simpler solution. He took the paper and held it up to the light, written side away from him. "Now it shows through," he announced. "Will one of you try to read? I haven't my glasses with me."

Lanark squinted and made shift to read:

"'Any man may look lightly into heaven, to the highest star; but who dares require of the bowels of Earth their abysmal secrets?'"

"That is my stepfather's handwriting," whispered Enid, her head close to Lanark's shoulder.

He read on: "'The rewards of Good are unproven; but the revenges of Evil are great, and manifest on all sides. Fear will always vanquish love.'"

He grinned slightly, harshly. Jager remembered having seen that grin in the old army days, before a battle.

"I think we're being warned," Lanark said to his old sergeant. "It's a challenge, meant to frighten us. But challenges have always drawn me."

"I can't believe," said Enid, "that fear will vanquish love." She blushed suddenly and rosily, as if embarrassed by her own words. "That is probably beside the point," she resumed. "What I began to say was that the sight of my stepfather's writing—why is it reversed like that?—the sight, anyway, has brought things back into my mind."

"What things?" Jager demanded eagerly. "Come into the house, Miss Mandifer, and tell us."

"Oh, not into the house," she demurred at once. "It's dark in there—damp and cold. Let's go out here, to the seat under the tree."

She conducted them to the bench whither Lanark had accompanied her the day before.

"Now," Jager prompted her, and she began:

"I remember of hearing him, when I was a child, as he talked to his son Larue and they thought I did not listen or did not comprehend. He told of these very things, these views he has written. He said, as if teaching Larue, 'Fear is stronger than love; where love can but plead, fear can command.'"

"A devil's doctrine!" grunted Jager, and Lanark nodded agreement.

"He said more," went on Enid. "He spoke of 'Those Below,' and of how they 'rule by fear, and therefore are

stronger than Those on High, who rule by weak love.'"

"Blasphemy," commented Jager, in his beard.

"Those statements fit what I remember of his talk," Lanark put in. "He spoke, just before we fought the guerrillas, of some great evil to come from flouting Those Below."

"I remember," nodded Jager. "Go on, young woman."

"Then there was the box."

"The box?" repeated both men quickly.

"Yes. It was a small case, of dark gray metal, or stone—or something. This, too, was when I was little. He offered it to Larue, and laughed when Larue could not open it."

Jager and Lanark darted looks at each other. They were remembering such a box.

"My stepfather then took it back," Enid related, "and said that it held his fate and fortune; that he would live and prosper until the secret writing within it should be taken forth and destroyed."

"I remember where that box is," Lanark said breathlessly to Jager. "In the old oven, at——"

"We could not open it, either," interrupted the preacher.

"He spoke of that, too," Enid told them. "It would never open, he told Larue, save in the 'place of the Nameless One'—that must be where the house burned—and at midnight under a full moon."

"A full moon!" exclaimed Lanark.

"There is a full moon tonight," said Jager.

The dread power that inhabited the metal box will be revealed in the fascinating chapters that bring this story to a conclusion in next month's WEIRD TALES. To make sure of getting your copy, we suggest that you reserve it at your magazine dealer's now.

Desert Dawn

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Dim seas of sand swim slowly into sight
  As if from out the silence swiftly born;
  Faint foremost herald of the coming morn,
Red tentacles reach out into the night;
The shadows gray, then fade to rosy white.
  The stars fade out, the greatest and the least;
  Now a red rose is blooming in the east,
And from its widening petals comes the light.

White, fleecy clouds are fading from on high,
  The sun-god flings afar his golden brands;
  A breeze springs up and races 'mid the dunes,
  A-whisper with old tales and mystic runes;
Now blue and gold ride rampant in the sky,
And now full day comes marching o'er the sands.

Satan, yawning on his brazen seat,
Fondles a screaming thing his fiends have flayed,
Ere Lilith come, his indolence to greet.
—Sterling: *A Wine of Wizardy.*

Comrades of Time

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrill-tale of our world a million years from now, and of the aged Wise One who craved the boon of death

1. Men from the Past

ETHAN DREW'S rifle was hot in his hand, and not from the scorching desert sun but from desperate firing. There were just two of them left, just two of this patrol of the Foreign Legion that had been ambushed here deep in the Sahara.

As he crouched in the scant shelter of the sandy gully, firing at the white-burnoosed riders out there in front of him, he laughed harshly. His browned, aquiline young face was taut, his nostrils flaring, gray eyes icy, as he called to his single companion.

"They're going to charge, Emil! Looks as if we won't be seeing the cafés at Sidi again."

"We're going to die!" wailed the other legionnaire, a swarthy, stocky Swiss, terror on his features. "We're going to——"

Thuck! The Swiss tumbled sidewise with a hole in his face, and lay sprawled half across the bodies of the other dead men. And the Tuaregs were now riding forward in their charge, white-garbed, veiled demons, flourishing their rifles and sabers and yelling like fiends as they came on.

Ethan Drew savagely aimed and pulled trigger. At the first shot, a horse and rider crashed. The second time he squeezed the trigger, there was only a click. The Lebel was empty. He grabbed a sword from a dead officer and stood up, his blond head bare in the blazing sunlight as he yelled recklessly.

"Come on, damn you!"

"Muhammad rasul Allah!" screamed the Tuaregs, racing each other for the honor of cutting down this last survivor.

Ethan Drew had a momentary vision of them thundering down on him, horses' eyes rolling wildly, upraised sabers glinting, veiled riders leaning forward. Then the whole world seemed suddenly to explode in blinding light, and he knew nothing more.

HE AWOKE to dim consciousness that he was lying on a cold, hard surface. The air was chill, with a pungent, unfamiliar quality. Now this was a strange thing, Ethan thought dully, to awake from death. For he knew the Tuaregs must have killed him in that charge—indeed, he had wanted to be killed rather than to be captured and tortured.

Yet he did not feel dead, at all. He could feel the cold floor under him distinctly, and was also aware that his head was aching badly. Also he could hear the voices of men close beside him.

He lay, feeling too dazed to open his eyes, and listened.

"No use buttin' your horns aginst a tree, Pedro," a dry, nasal voice was drawling. "This Injun don't like bein' cooped up here no more than you do, but thar ain't anything we can do about it."

"But, *Dios,* I shall go mad in this cursed cell!" swore another, angry voice with a strong Spanish accent. "It's

no place for a *conquistador*. I'd welcome the devil himself if he got me out of here."

"Cease blaspheming, man," commanded a harsh, deep voice. "If it is the Lord's will that we escape from here, we shall do so."

Ethan Drew listened with gathering amazement. Then he stirred, struggling to sit up.

"The new one is awakening!" someone called. There was a rush of feet toward the young American as he sat up and looked around. He found that he still held the officer's sword clutched in his hand.

He was sitting on the floor of a large room of black stone. There was but one window, a tiny, heavily barred one through which came an oblique shaft of dusky *red* sunlight. The only door was a small metal trap-door in the ceiling, sixteen feet overhead.

The men in the room were crowding eagerly around Ethan Drew. The dazed young American looked bewild-

"The rough stone walls were grown with evil-looking fungi and mosses."

eringly at the foremost of them, who was bending keenly forward.

He was a tall, lank man of forty, dressed in greasy buckskin shirt, trousers and moccasins, and a shabby coonskin cap. A big hunting-knife was stuck in his belt, and he held a long, old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifle in the hollow of his arm. He had a weathered, saturnine face with jutting jaw and cool, wise blue eyes.

"Feelin' all right?" he asked Ethan. "It shore takes the tucker out of you when you first get here. This child knows."

"Who—who are you?" Ethan asked haltingly.

"Me, I'm Hank Martin, the best trapper an' scout in the Rockies, barrin' my friend, Kit Carson," drawled the tall figure.

"A mountain-man of Kit Carson's time?" gasped Ethan Drew. "Why, you're crazy! That was a hundred years ago!"

"That's what *you* think," drawled Hank Martin dryly. "You've got a lot to learn, young feller. Why, just a week ago, it seems, I was trappin' up in the Utes with Kit and ol' Bill Williams and the rest."

Ethan stared at the man unbelievingly. His stare became more incredulous as he saw the man standing beside the trapper. This was a stalwart, broad-shouldered figure with a stern, somber, massive face, dressed in drab homespun uniform, high leather boots and a plain black hat. A huge broadsword swung at his wide belt.

"I am John Crewe, formerly corporal in the Ironsides of that man of God, Oliver Cromwell," he said in his deep, harsh voice. "Say, do you know anything of how we were brought here, or for what reason?"

"Aye, if you know who has done this, just tell me his name!" roared another voice before Ethan could answer. *"Por Dios,* I'll gut him like a rat, whoever he is! I'll teach him what it means to play his enchanter's tricks upon Pedro Lopez!"

Lopez was a fierce-mustached, eagle-eyed, swearing Spaniard who wore the iron helmet and breastplate and baggy boots and long sword of a Sixteenth Century *conquistador.*

"I'll make the wizard who played this trick on me wish he'd never been born!" he roared. "Am I, one of the valiant followers of the peerless Don Hernando Cortez, to be snatched out of my own time by black magic, without slitting a few throats in return?"

"Aw, cool down, Pedro," drawled Hank Martin. "Can't you see I want to interduce the rest of the boys to this tenderfoot?"

"This *must* be a crazy joke of some kind!" Ethan exclaimed hoarsely. "You men—from times centuries apart—it's impossible!"

"Shore, mebbe it's impossible, but it's true," Hank Martin drawled coolly. "We've been in here for days together, most of us, and we've got pretty well acquainted, and Crewe and I hev larned the others some English. Speak up, boys, and tell our new pardner who you are."

A small, wiry man with a dark face and cunning eyes, wearing the bronze armor and short sword of a soldier of ancient Egypt, stepped forward and spoke calmly to the dazed Ethan in halting English.

"I am Ptah, soldier of the great Thothmes the Third," he said proudly. "I followed him to the conquest of Syria."

"And I," added a heavy, rumbling voice, "am Swain Njallson, seafarer and raider, whose beaked ships have

been feared from my own Northland south even to Mikligard."

Swain was a huge giant of a man, a Tenth Century viking whose blond hair flowed from under his horned helmet, whose blue eyes were icy cold as his native seas. An enormous axe was gripped in his hand.

ETHAN DREW's eyes roamed dazedly over the weirdly assorted five men. He still felt that all of this was utterly unreal, yet the men before him were no hallucination. Ancient Egyptian and viking and Spanish *conquistador,* Rocky Mountain trapper and Puritan trooper, they stood before him as real as himself.

"I'm Ethan Drew, and I'm from a later time than any of you," he said unsteadily. "From the year 1938. I was fighting off enemies, about to be killed, when there was a blaze of light; then I awoke here."

"Same thing happened to all of us," Hank Martin told him. "Me, I was heelin' it out of Ute Pass with a bunch of redskins after me when somethin' hit me and I woke up here. I was alone at first—later on, the trap-door in the ceilin' opened, and they let down this little fellow Ptah, from Egypt. The others here came the same way, one after another, through the trap-door. And now you, too."

"Then you've never seen the person or persons who brought us here?" Ethan cried bewilderingly.

Hank Martin shook his head. "Nary once. The trap-door is opened and grub and water are let down to us once a day, but that's all."

"Isn't there any way to escape from here?" Ethan exclaimed. "What about that window?"

"Look for yourself," Hank drawled.

Ethan went to the little window. He saw at once that escape by it was impossible. It was only a foot square and barred with heavy rods of metal. But he was stricken with awe and wonder by the weird vista outside.

Before him, black rock cliffs sloped down steeply toward a vast expanse of flat country thickly blanketed by dense green jungle. As far as the eye could reach stretched that silent, mighty wilderness, unearthly and forbidding.

Across the limitless jungle struck the level crimson rays of the descending sun. Huge and blood-red and weirdly glowing, it was sinking toward the horizon. It might have been a different sun entirely, setting upon a wild and unknown planet.

"This isn't my own time—this isn't 1938," Ethan Drew muttered in awe. "We've all been drawn somehow into the far future."

"The future?" repeated John Crewe, frowning. "What makes you think that?"

"Look at the sun," Ethan said quickly. "It is far redder, which means it is older—millions of years older."

"How in the devil's name *could* we be dragged across millions of years?" Pedro Lopez demanded loudly. "It is impossible."

"It is the work of Loki, the demon god," rumbled Swain Njallson with conviction. "Only he could do this to us."

John Crewe, the big Puritan, cast a gloomy glance at the huge viking.

"Talk not of your heathen gods doing this," he said harshly. "No vain idols brought us here but Satan, the Evil One, himself."

"Wal, how we got here don't bother me much," drawled Hank Martin. "What bothers me is how we're going to get back to our own times. Me, I don't cotton to the looks of this world

much—I'd ruther be back in the Rockies, trappin' beaver and dodgin' Injuns."

Ethan Drew looked up keenly at the little metal trap-door in the high stone ceiling.

"Have you tried to reach that door, by standing on each other's shoulders?" he asked.

"Yes, but we could never reach it," Pedro Lopez told him. *"Sangre de Dios,* I'm still sore all over from the falls I had on this cursed stone floor."

"But now there is another of us to help!" Ptah, the Egyptian, exclaimed, pointing at Ethan. "We might be able to make it now!"

"Let us make the attempt, then," rumbled Swain. "Anything is better than rotting away to a cow's death in this cell."

The six men began to form a human pyramid beneath the trap-door. Swain, John Crewe and Hank Martin, as the three biggest of them, formed the base. Pedro Lopez and Ethan climbed onto their shoulders. And then Ptah, the smallest and wiriest of them, mounted precariously upon the shoulders of Ethan and the *conquistador.*

The whole pyramid swayed hazardously as the little Egyptian attacked the trap-door with his bronze shortsword. But the huge shoulders of the viking, down at the heart of the human tower's base, steadied them. And presently they heard a clang from above, and an exultant cry from Ptah.

"I have it open!" he cried to them.

They felt the little Egyptian scramble up through the opening. Then he unfastened and let down his leather belt, and hauled Ethan and the Spaniard up.

By fastening together all their belts, they were able to pull up Hank Martin and John Crewe and Swain, though the huge weight of the viking almost snapped the improvised leather rope. Then, panting from their efforts, they stared excitedly around them.

They stood in a narrow, dusky stone corridor.

It turned in a sharp angle a few yards away, preventing them from seeing any distance along it.

But as they stood panting, there came dimly to them down this corridor a sound familiar to all these men—one that made them stiffen—the clash of steel against steel, of sword against sword!

"Fightin' goin' on!" exclaimed Hank Martin, the trapper's leathery face tightening.

They heard a bull voice in the distance shouting orders, then a woman's sharp scream.

"Odin, at least there is battle in this world!" exclaimed Swain, blue eyes gleaming. "Let us go to it, comrades!"

"Aye, for I still crave the blood of the wizard who brought us here," cried Pedro Lopez fiercely.

The viking's great axe raised Hank Martin's long rifle under his arm, the swords of the others gleaming in the dusk, they started along the corridor.

2. Rumble of Doom

THE clash of swords had ceased, but the feminine scream was repeated as the six fighting-men advanced. Then as they rounded the turn in the corridor, they beheld the source of those screams.

Two black-bearded, black-armored men with wolfish faces held a white-faced girl. Laughing at her wild struggles, one of them tore away the neck of her short white robe, exposing an ivory shoulder and breast. The girl, her dark eyes blazing and her black hair

wildly disheveled, struck in vain with tiny fists.

Ethan Drew's blood heated in swift anger at the sight. He started ahead, sword raised.

"We can't let *that* go on!" he rasped.

"They are godless men—sons of Belial," said John Crewe harshly. "Forward!"

The two black-bearded soldiers looked up and saw that grim, weirdly assorted little company of six men coming down the corridor toward them. They released the girl and yelled in alarm, at the same time drawing their swords.

Other black-armored soldiers came hurrying into the farther cell of the corridor in answer to the call.

Then Ethan Drew's sword clashed the blade of one of the two warriors. The swift anger that boiled in the young American brought all his remembered fencing skill into his muscles as he parried a vicious blow and then stabbed fiercely.

His opponent went down, his throat transfixed by Ethan's blade. At the same moment the other of the two who had held the girl sank in a lifeless heap, his neck half severed by John Crewe's broad blade.

"Thus die all followers of Satan!" shouted the big Puritan with fanatic fervor.

"Here come the others!" yelled Ptah.

The girl had sunk fainting to the floor. Ethan hastily swept her behind them, then faced with his comrades the dozen warriors racing down the corridor. They were bellowing with rage, those fierce-faced men in black armor. Their swords gleamed in the dusky light, lust to kill written on their faces.

Crack! One of them fell with a neat little hole drilled between his eyes.

"Easy shootin'," drawled Hank Martin. "I wish Kit and ol' Bill was here."

Then the charging warriors met the line of six men. Sparks flew through the dusk as sword clashed fiercely against sword.

Ethan Drew fought with forced coolness, his brown, lean face set in a mirthless grin as he stabbed and feinted. The first man to oppose him reeled back with his shoulder impaled, howling.

Another raised his blade to slash sidewise at the American. Before the man could complete the stroke, Ptah's bronze shortsword bit into his vitals. The swarthy little Egyptian calmly attacked another man.

A hell of battle raged in that dusky hallway for minutes. Hank Martin had clubbed his long rifle and was smashing faces into red pulp with its butt. John Crewe's somber, massive face held a stern light of battle as he struck with his big broadsword.

"Spawn of Beelzebub!" muttered the big Puritan as he fought. "Men without righteousness!"

"Come on, dogs!" Lopez was roaring. The *conquistador* cursed as he hacked. "I'll make you sorry your mothers ever bore you!"

But it was Swain Njallson who was doing most execution in that cramped, terrific fight. The huge viking's axe whirled in circles of blinding death, smashing helmet after helmet, his blue eyes blazing.

It was too much for the black-armored attackers. They recoiled, leaving more than half their number dead, then turned and ran down the corridor.

"Flee, vermin!" Lopez shouted

after them. "Now you know what it means to meet a cavalier of Spain."

"Haw! haw!" chuckled Hank Martin, reloading his rifle. "They sure bit off more'n they could chew."

Ethan Drew, while the others stood panting, was bending over the unconscious girl, seeking to revive her. The ripe curves of her body were hardly concealed by the short, torn white robe. There were still red marks of rude fingers on her creamy shoulders.

She opened great, dark eyes, gazed bewilderedly up into Ethan's lean face, Her eyes widened in wonder, her soft red lips parted. Then as memory came back, she sprang erect.

"My father!" she cried. "Thorold and his soldiers have captured him!"

ETHEN was amazed to find that he could understand her words. For she spoke in a language that seemed descended from English, though it was changed in inflection and accent and in many word-meanings.

"Who are you?" Ethan demanded. "And who are the men who were attacking you?"

"They were some of Thorold's soldiers!" she cried. "I am Chiri, and my father, Kim Idim, is the man who brought you all into this time out of your own past ages."

"Ha, so your father did that!" exclaimed Pedro Lopez, scowling fiercely. "Then I will see this father of yours. He'll eat six inches of steel if he doesn't——"

"Shut up, Pedro," drawled Hank Martin. "Let the little lady tell us what she's drivin' at."

"You must save Kim Idim, my father!" Chiri was crying desperately to Ethan.

"Come on, boys," the American rasped to his comrades. "I don't know yet what this is all about, but we're going to find out."

They started on a run along the corridor, Chiri frantically leading the way. The corridor soon debouched into a high, domed hall. Gleaming, grotesque machines about it made it look like a laboratory.

Three men who appeared to have been servants lay dead here, swords still clutched in their hands. Chiri ran around them and through a door into the open air. Ethan and his comrades followed her closely.

They emerged into the dusky red sunset, on a paved terrace. Behind them loomed the building in which they had been confined, a domed structure of black stone, immeasurably ancient-looking.

In front of them, the steep black cliff slanted down to the green sea of jungle. A precarious pathway angled down the cliff.

Chiri cried out and pointed down to the bottom of the cliff, hundreds of feet below.

"See, there are Thorold and his soldiers! And my father!"

Ethan peered down and saw a score of men in black armor at the foot of the cliff, hastily mounting horses which had been tethered there.

One of these men, apparently the leader Thorold, was a huge-framed, dark-faced giant who was shouting orders in a bull voice as he mounted.

A thin, white-haired old man with blood flowing from his temple had been thrust in front of one of the mounted warriors. His hands were bound. And a squat, heavy-looking machine had been hastily loaded into a litter swung between two of the horses.

"Thorold is taking my father and the time-ray projector to Tzar!" Chiri cried. "Stop them!"

"Hank, try to drop the big fellow," Ethan said hastily.

Hank Martin quickly raised his long rifle. But as the trapper did so, the giant Thorold shouted an order and the whole troop below spurred forward into the jungle and were instantly hidden under the trees.

"Dang it, I was a mite too slow!" the buckskin-clad trapper exclaimed in vexation.

"We can follow them, and my sword will not be too slow!" exclaimed Pedro Lopez, starting toward the path down the cliff.

"Aye, let us follow," rumbled Swain, the viking's blue eyes still burning with the battle light.

"Wait!" Ethan commanded. "We can't overtake them now, mounted as they are. And we need to know where we stand before we go very far in this world."

"That's right," Hank Martin approved. "Unless we scout the land before we move, we'll run into an ambush and lose our scalps sure."

PTAH and John Crewe nodded agreement, and the viking and the *conquistador* came back.

Chiri grasped Ethan's arm anxiously, her dark eyes looking pleadingly up at him.

"You will follow and save my father from Thorold?" she cried urgently.

"Why should we?" Ethan demanded sternly. "You admit it was some hellish experiment of your father's that drew us out of our own times into this future age. We owe nothing to him, who played that trick upon us."

"It is true," said John Crewe somberly. "And yon old man whom they captured cannot be a godly man, or he would not juggle with time against the will of heaven, as he did."

Chiri's eyes flashed sudden defiance, and she stamped her little foot.

"If you refuse to rescue my father, you will stay in this time forever!" she told them; "for only he can send you back to your own ages. And now Thorold has him and his time-ray projector."

"That kinder changes things," muttered Hank Martin thoughtfully. "Me, I don't want to stay in this queer layout forever."

"Nor I either!" Pedro Lopez declared. "I was assisting the valiant Don Hernando Cortez in the conquest of those dogs, the Aztecs, when I was drawn into this age. I must get back to my own time—the peerless Don Hernando will miss my help sorely."

"Where has this fellow Thorold taken your father and the machine?" Ethan asked Chiri.

"To the city of Tzar," she said.

"And where is that?" he demanded.

"It lies thirty miles from here, upon the coast of this land," she told him. "Thorold is the king of Tzar, under the Wise One."

She saw that they did not understand her references.

"I forgot that you know nothing of this time!" she exclaimed. "I will explain. You are now, by your reckoning, in the year 1,243,665."

"Over a million years in the future?" gasped Ethan. "I suspected it, yet——"

"Witchcraft, an unholy business," muttered John Crewe, looking sternly at the girl.

"Aye, black magic of Set," whispered Ptah.

CHIRI continued tensely, her dark eyes clinging to Ethan's lean face.

"The name of this continent is Tzar. It is the last continent left upon earth, for all other continents have sunk beneath the oceans because of great shifts

inside the earth. There are islands, but they are uninhabitable because of fierce beasts and fiercer savages.

"And this land of Tzar is doomed like the other continents. Its rock foundations have been crumbling for ages, with many earth-shocks, and many fear the day close at hand when this last continent will sink also into the sea.

"Once the people of Tzar were a mighty race, strong in wisdom. But with doom staring them in the face, they have neglected their science until most of their wisdom is forgotten, and they now use the weapons and ways that are simplest, thinking it folly to seek knowledge when death is approaching. Only a few scientists still keep the ancient learning alive.

"My father, Kim Idim, is one of those scientists. We dwelt in the capital city, Tzar. There reigns Thorold, the king, and there broods the mysterious Wise One, the immortal creature or being who has lived for ages and is almost the deity of our race. None but the king ever sees the Wise One, who remains always in his secret chamber, and only the king even knows what the Wise One looks like, but all Tzar reveres its enigmatic deity.

"My father, Kim Idim, in the course of his secret scientific studies, discovered recently a miraculous power. He had been investigating time. He believed that time is only a dimension and that with the proper force, he could reach into past or future and draw people or objects into this time. And he finally found a force that could do that, an energy he called the time-ray.

"Father tried to keep his tremendous achievement secret. But Thorold, our king, heard of it. He demanded the secret of the time-ray from Father. He wanted to use it so that he could escape with the Wise One from our doomed land into future ages, before Tzar sinks into the sea.

"Father refused Thorold's demand. He knew him to be an evil and ruthless despot, and would not loose such a tyrant upon future ages. Thorold threatened Father with death if he continued to refuse the secret. So my father and I escaped secretly from the city Tzar into this wilderness, with a few servants, taking refuge in this ancient and long-abandoned watch-tower.

"Here my father proposed to complete his great experiment of drawing men out of the past, for nothing could dim his passion of scientific curiosity. He built a projector for the time-ray, and turned the ray back into the past. Seeing along the ray, he drew you six men out of past ages, one by one. He meant only to learn from you the secrets of the past, and then to send you back to your own times.

"But Thorold must have tracked us to our refuge! For he came today and seized my father and the time-ray projector, as you saw. He has taken them to Tzar. And there he will torture my father until he consents to demonstrate the use of the projector, so that by means of it, Thorold and the Wise One can escape into future ages. And that means a menacing wolf, armed by the immense wisdom of the Wise One, let loose upon the unguessable future!"

Chiri's dark eyes were wide with dread as she finished, her voice sinking almost to a whisper.

Ethan had listened with increasing amazement, as had his five comrades.

"And you want us to follow to the city of Tzar and rescue your father and the machine?" Ethan muttered thoughtfully. "That's a tall order."

Hank Martin shrugged his buckskin shoulders. "It shore is," he drawled,

"but we got to do it, if we hanker to get back to our own times."

"Of course!" bellowed Pedro Lopez. "We simply break into this cursed city and take the old man and his devilish contrivance, and that'll be all."

Swain Njallson nodded in cold agreement. But Ptah shook his head, his subtle face frowning.

"It will take stealth and cunning," the little Egyptian said, "but we must try it."

"Aye, it is our duty," said John Crewe harshly. "This Thorold seems an evil tyrant, an Ahab like that Charles Stuart whom I helped pluck from his throne. It is God's work to pull down such a despot."

Ethan nodded, his lean brown face tight and hard as he turned back to the anxious girl.

"We'll do our best to rescue your father, Chiri," he told her. "But you've got to promise that if we succeed, he'll return us to our own times."

"I promise!" she said eagerly. "And I will guide you to Tzar and into it—I know a secret way."

"Good!" cried Pedro Lopez impatiently. "Then let us be off at once. Strike quickly!—that was always the watchword of the incomparable Don Hernando."

ETHAN led the way toward the path that angled down the cliff, the girl clinging to his arm, the other fighting-men following. The sun, huge and red, was poised now above the distant horizon, sinking slowly behind the rim of the jungle.

They moved carefully down the risky path. It was dusk when they reached the base of the cliff. Before them yawned the jungle, already dark and mysterious, giant monarchs of the forest rearing two hundred feet into the twilight, shadowy things moving amid the vines that trailed from the trees.

The ground suddenly quivered violently under them. The whole towering cliff and dark jungle rocked like a boat in a storm. They were flung from their feet. And Ethan Drew, as he was sickeningly aware of the rolling and shaking of the rock under him, heard a dim, distant, terrible grinding from far beneath.

The convulsion passed off quickly. They staggered up unsteadily, feeling the ground still trembling under them, and saw that the towering monarchs of the jungle still waved branches wildly in the dusk.

"What in the name of Osiris was *that?*" Ptah gasped.

"'Twas an earth temblor," Pedro Lopez announced. "We felt more than that as we followed Don Hernando up to Tenochtitlan."

"Yes," whispered Chiri. A strange dread, fateful and brooding, was in her dark eyes. "It was another omen that the end of the land of Tzar is near. They come ever more often, these rockings of the continent under us——"

Then she recovered herself, and moved toward a dim trail opening into the shadowy jungle.

"We must hurry!" she declared "This new shaking of the earth will reinforce Thorold's determination to escape from this time. Unless we rescue my father tonight, we will be too late."

3. In the City of Tzar

THE moon had risen soon after midnight, and its brilliant, silvery light penetrated through crevices in the roof of foliage, into the dark jungle in which the six men and the girl pressed forward. The wilderness through

which they had been moving for hours was made a weird, unreal fairyland by the broken bars of silver light that slanted between the huge, towering black trees.

Ethan glanced up through the thick foliage as he and his comrades followed Chiri through the forest. He saw that the moon's orb was half again as large as he had ever seen it, and he realized that the long ages that had passed had brought the dead satellite far closer to its parent planet. He could clearly discern the great craters and mountains on its barren face.

Chiri, moving beside him along the vague trail, pressed his hand with her soft fingers.

"We are nearing the city of Tzar, Ethan," she whispered.

He felt her fingers trembling, and quick sympathy for her dread and bravery filled him.

"Keep your chin up, Chiri," he told her encouragingly. "We'll get your father out all right. Good Lord! this outfit is tough enough to lick an army."

"I know," the Tzaran girl whispered fearfully, "yet I am afraid, not alone of Thorold but of the Wise One, the undying one whom no one knows."

Ethan put his arm protectively around her shoulders as they moved on. Briars whipped their faces, creeping vines and roots tripped them. The breath of the jungle was a damp, steamy exhalation about them, laden with strange scents, alien and sinister.

More than once he heard the crash of great bodies moving in the wilderness, and once the flapping of enormous wings reached his ears and he glimpsed a huge shadow flying over the jungle roof.

He could only guess as to what weird forms of life earth might have produced during the vast period of time across which he and his companions had been drawn.

Ethan could hardly realize that it was all real, that he actually marched through the moonlit jungle of a million years in the future, with a girl of this future day and five hardy fighting-men from past ages. Yet the feel of Chiri's trusting hand in his, the sound of Pedro Lopez cursing in voluble Spanish as he tripped, the heavy tread of the viking and the occasional monosyllables of Ptah and John Crewe and the trapper, reminded the young American that it was all actually happening.

And he and his comrades were in this doomed land of Tzar to stay, unless they could rescue old Kim Idim and his miraculous mechanism. Determination to achieve that hardened in him. He didn't want to stay in this future time, exiled from his own age.

CHIRI suddenly came to a halt in the shadows, her fingers tightening again on his hand.

"Yonder lies Tzar," she whispered tensely.

Ethan and his comrades peered eagerly through the foliage. A quarter mile ahead there loomed out of the moonlit jungle an enormous black wall. Inside that titan barrier of ebon stone reared colossal masses of pyramidal structures, some of them rising many hundreds of feet. Monstrous, barbaric-looking city of the far future, looming up into the silver moonlight out of the jungle that hemmed it in! Ruddy lights in the buildings bit holes through the moonlight, and there was a dim, pulsing murmur of life.

"It looks like Babylon," Ptah whispered in awe. "But great as Babylon was when I beheld it, this city is even greater."

"It is true, this place is larger even than Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs," muttered Pedro Lopez.

Swain Njallson had raised his great head, and Ethan saw the viking stiffen suddenly.

"I smell the sea," Swain said, sniffing like a bloodhound suddenly aroused.

"Yes, the ocean laps against the farther side of the city Tzar," Chiri informed him.

"How are we going to get into the place?" Ethan asked her tautly. "I see no gate."

"There is a gate, but it is locked against the beasts of the jungle," Chiri answered. Her face was pale in the white moonlight as she added, "But I know a way inside—the same secret way by which my father and I escaped with our servants. It will take us even to the Citadel of the Wise One, where the king Thorold dwells and where he will have taken my father."

As she spoke, she pointed to one enormous pyramid, far inside the wall of the city, whose truncated summit loomed far above the other buildings into the brilliant moonlight.

"Follow me," she whispered.

Ethan and his comrades slipped after her through the tangled vegetation, toward the looming wall of Tzar. The jungle grew right up to the wall, and clawed with vines and creepers at the giant barrier.

They soon stood in the shadows at the base of the wall. Chiri led the way along it until they came to an opening in the wall, a round, dark tunnel-mouth six feet in diameter. It was dark as the pit, and a thin trickle of water ran out of it.

"This is one of the drains of the city," Chiri whispered. "Once there was a grating across it, but it has rusted away and the people of Tzar, who think of naught but pleasure in the face of the coming doom, have not bothered to replace it. This is our way inside the city."

"I ain't exactly pinin' away to go crawlin' up a danged rabbit-hole," muttered Hank Martin.

"Nor I," said Ptah. "One could easily be trapped in such tunnels."

"It is the only way inside," Chiri said anxiously.

"And we're taking it," Ethan declared decisively. "Come on, boys."

They followed without further dissent as he led the way with Chiri into the dark stone tunnel. Their feet splashed in the water as they advanced into the gloomy, lightless passage. After they had gone a few paces, Chiri drew from her robe a tiny tube which shot forth a thin ray of light that partly showed the way.

Ethan saw that the rough stone walls of the great drain were grown with evil-looking white fungi and mosses. White snakes whipped away in front of them, and large white rat-like rodents scuttled ahead. The air here was dank and heavy.

The tunnel forked, dividing into two separate drains. Without hesitation, Chiri led into the left one. They had gone but a short way along this, when Chiri turned and motioned them to observe caution.

They soon saw the reason. Close ahead was a place where the drain protruded up into one of the streets of Tzar, covered by a stone grating. They reached this spot and cautiously raised their heads so that they could look out into the city street.

Tzar was weirdly beautiful under the huge moon. The vast, somber pyramidal buildings towered out of shadowy gardens and smoothly paved

streets, ruddy light blinking from a myriad windows. And in streets and buildings, the people of Tzar were engaged in a mad revelry, a saturnalia of frenzied merry-making, throbbing through the whole city! Music, wild and gay, was pulsing everywhere. There were dancers inside the great buildings, their shadowy forms racing across the windows. And there were music and dancing and drunken laughter in the street into which Ethan and his companions looked.

They saw wantonly laughing girls and women pursued by intoxicated men. Youthful figures stumbled unsteadily past, with wine spilled upon their white robes.

A carnival of utter license seemed unloosed here in the black city beneath the brilliant moon.

"A city of luxury and sin!" muttered John Crewe harshly, the Puritan's somber face stern and condemnatory in the dim light. "Yes, a city of Belial, its wicked people flown with insolence and wine."

"Hell, I wish I was out there with them," swore Pedro Lopez. "I could enjoy myself out there."

SWAIN NJALLSON spat in contempt. "These are a soft, weak race," the viking rumbled scornfully.

"They hold revelry," whispered Chiri, "but it is because they know that this land and city are nearing their doom. It is only in wine and pleasure that my people can forget the dread shadow deepening over them."

And almost as she spoke, there came with startling coincidence an omen of that which she mentioned. A slow, grinding drum-roll sounded from deep within the earth, gathering in volume like a rolling snowball until it broke and crashed in a dull detonation like thunder underground. At the same moment, the whole city shook violently, the great pyramids swaying visibly in the moonlight, rocking Ethan and his comrades from side to side in the tunnel. Then the grinding roll beneath diminished to a dim muttering that died away.

"A sign of God's wrath at this wicked city!" exclaimed John Crewe, his eyes fanatical. "A warning of Jehovah's vengeance!"

"Yes, a warning," whispered Chiri, dread again widening her eyes. "A warning that the doom of Tzar is close —close."

Out in the streets, the carnival of revelry had come to an abrupt halt with the earth-shock. There had been a few screams of terror, followed by an utter silence.

That dead, unnatural silence endured for minutes. The people in the streets seemed stricken to stone. Then suddenly the laughter and music burst forth wilder than before, as though to drown the memory of that ominous shock.

"Fear not, friends—the doom of Tzar has not come yet!" called a drunken voice.

"Aye, it will never come—the Wise One will find a way to save our land," cried another.

"Drink to the Wise One!" yelled an intoxicated soldier in black armor, waving an amphora aloft. "To the Wise One, who will save us!"

The toast was drunk almost frantically, and the wild saturnalia went on at heightened pace.

Ethan and his companions lowered their heads and started forward again in the tunnel.

"They do not really believe that even the Wise One can save them," Chiri murmured as she led the way.

"But they clutch at that last straw of hope."

Lighted by her little torch, the six men pressed on through divergent drains, passing cautiously under other gratings open to the streets. Finally the girl halted, her face pale and tense in the little ray of light.

She pointed to a square stone trap-door in the roof of the drain, just over their heads.

"That opens into the cellars in the lowest levels of the Citadel of the Wise One," she whispered. "And now we have come to the most hazardous part. For there are always many people in the Citadel, except in the uppermost level where Thorold and the Wise One dwell."

"We'll have to take our chance of stealing up through the building unobserved," Ethan said, his lean face tight with desperate resolution. "Keep behind me, Chiri."

Swain reached up, and softly the viking's great arms lifted up the stone trap-door and set it aside. Silently they clambered up through the opening and then looked around.

They stood in dark, gloomy stone cellars, their walls dripping with condensation. From the upper levels of the vast pile, voices and the occasional tread of feet reached them. Through slit-like windows, bright bars of moonlight entered.

"This way to the stair that leads upward," Chiri murmured, starting through the dark crypts. "But I fear now it is madness of us even to attempt to reach the forbidden uppermost level."

Ethan had begun to think so too, but he did not voice his opinion.

"Courage, Chiri," he whispered.

They passed through several of the gloomy and apparently unused stone cellars, into one from which a narrow stairway led upward. Ethan was leading toward this when the unexpected happened.

Two soldiers in black armor, warriors of Tzar, emerged suddenly from that stairway. They had evidently been drawn to investigate by some slight sound, for their swords were in their hands and they peered quickly around the dusky crypt as they entered.

One of them saw Ethan and his group, ten feet away. He uttered a cry of alarm.

"Strangers with swords! Warn the guards!"

Before the last words left his lips, the man was tumbling to the floor. Ethan had leaped forward with leopard swiftness, and his sword-point had ripped through the armor joints of the Tzaran warrior and into his heart.

The other man, a little up the steps, turned and started to flee wildly up the stair. Something flashed like a gleaming snake across the moonshot darkness of the chamber, toward him.

He crashed dead upon the stairs. Swain had hurled his axe with unerring aim, and the viking's heavy weapon had broken the fleeing man's neck.

"A good cast," grunted the Northman.

4. Citadel of the Wise One

THEY waited tensely for a moment, swords ready. There was no alarm from above.

"His cry wasn't heard," Ethan rasped. Then as an idea came to him, his eyes lit with excitement, surveying the two dead armored men.

"This gives us a better chance to get to the topmost level!" the young American exclaimed. "Two of us will

put on the armor of these men, and go up with Chiri. We can pass as Tzaran guards, that way. Pedro, you and I will do it—we look more like Tzarans than the rest of you."

"Good!" approved the *conquistador*. "Our two blades will be enough for the job."

"What do you figger the rest of us are going to do?" Hank Martin demanded aggrievedly.

"You'll wait down here for us," Ethan told the tall trapper. "If we can get Kim Idim and his machine, we'll bring them down and we'll all escape back out of the city by the drains."

"Am I to cower here in darkness while others have the fighting?" Swain rumbled rebelliously.

"Aye," said John Crewe harshly, "we should all go together. God will arm our cause."

Ptah disagreed, the little Egyptian's crafty face earnest. "The plan is a good one," he declared. "Cunning may win where brute force would fail."

But the viking and the trapper were still grumbling as Ethan and Pedro hastily donned the black helmets and armor of the two dead men.

"We should be back soon if we succeed," Ethan told them, pausing on the steps with the Spaniard and Chiri. "If we fail, then you must do as you think best."

"If they count coup over you, we'll take plenty scalps to even the score," Hank Martin promised him grimly.

Then Ethan and Pedro started up the stair, with Chiri's slim white figure between them.

The stairway was a dark, spiral one. Five minutes of climbing brought them suddenly into the main ground level of the Citadel of the Wise One.

Here was a huge labyrinth of dusky halls and corridors, partly illuminated by glowing red torches on the walls. And here, as in the streets outside, were laughter and shouting and drunken calls of intoxicated soldiers and women. It was evident that the discipline of Thorold's soldiery, like everything else, was crumbling as the doom of Tzar neared it.

Chiri led the way toward a great stair. As they passed the revellers at its bottom, Ethan pretended tipsiness himself, stumbled unsteadily with his arm around the girl's slender waist, laughing thickly.

"Stay and drink with us, comrades!" exclaimed a group of armored soldiers and women at the foot of the great stair.

Ethan shook his head drunkenly. One of the men grasped Chiri's arm. The American pushed the fellow away with an unsteady gesture. He fell sprawling and the others laughed loudly.

A supple girl had pressed against Pedro's side and was whispering amorously to him. Ethan gave the Spaniard a warning nudge, and he thrust the girl away. But as they started up the stair, Pedro's voice was rueful.

"Curse it, that wench was a sweet armful! If we only had a little more time——"

"Don't be a fool!" Ethan muttered savagely to the *conquistador*. "We've got to hurry."

As Chiri led the way tensely up the broad, winding stairway, they passed other soldiers lying in drunken sleep on the steps. They climbed through level after level of the vast, shadowy Citadel. Through windows along the way they could look down on the wild carnival of revelry still throbbing in the streets of Tzar—desperate merrymaking of a city doomed to destruction.

And as they mounted higher in the

dusky pile, they could look out beyond the city at the moonlit jungle, and on the opposite side, the silvery, heaving ocean, washing against the wall of Tzar as though eager to claw the doomed city down into the deep.

"This temple is like the great teocalli of Huitzilpochtli of the Aztecs," Pedro muttered as they climbed. *"Dios* it seems but yesterday that I and my fellow cavaliers hacked our way to the top of that temple and cast down its evil idols."

"We are nearing the tenth level, the highest," Chiri whispered tensely. "On that level are Thorold's apartments and also the chamber of the Wise One."

In a few moments they stood amid the dusky network of passages on the topmost story of the great truncated pyramid. A few torches cast ruddy light along the enigmatic passages, but no one was to be seen.

"Where would Thorold have your father?" Ethan demanded in a low voice of the girl.

She shook her head, her face pale. "I do not know. I have never been here before—this level is forbidden to all but the king and his personal guards, because here dwells the Wise One whom none but the king may see."

"We'll have to look for Kim Idim until we find him, then," Ethan rasped. "Come on, Pedro."

He and Pedro had their swords out as they moved blindly through the corridors.

Ethan tried door after door, but behind them were only dark and unoccupied chambers.

Then a distant scream of agony in a high, shrill voice echoed through the corridors, sinking into a long, low wail that died away.

"My father!" cried Chiri wildly. "Thorold's torturers must be at work on him!"

"That scream came from this direction, I thought," Ethan grated, turning and hurrying down a cross corridor, with Pedro and the girl after him.

THE scream had not been repeated. Ethan reached the end of the corridor, and found himself confronted by a blank silver door in a high, massive frame.

Sword gleaming in the dusk, he pushed the door softly open. Inside was a small antechamber. He and the *conquistador* and Chiri crossed this silently, and stepped into a dim, high, round room.

It had broad windows that looked across the streets of Tzar, seething with saturnalia far below, and across the moonlit ocean beyond. And in the shafts of moonlight from the windows, there sat alone in this silent room a creature of incredible, unearthly appearance, a creature that riveted their horrified gaze.

"The Wise One!" gasped Chiri in utter horror. "We have blundered into the chamber of the undying one!"

Ethan felt his brain reel at sight of the ghastly creature before them. He heard Lopez gasp and cross himself.

The Wise One, staring at them, spoke in a low, flat, strange voice.

"You are not men of Tzar!" the creature whispered. "You must be some of the strangers whom the scientist Kim Idim drew out of the past.

"Look at me, then, strangers!" the thing commanded, its voice rising weirdly. "I am the Wise One, he who does not die, who holds the wisdom of ages. Look at me, and envy me!"

And appallingly, a burst of high, insane laughter shrilled from the crea-

ture, a bitter, maniacal mirth that made the hair bristle on Ethan's neck.

The Wise One was—a human head! a *living* head, great and hairless, whose bald skull bulged in a great dome, whose face was white and plump, whose eyes were enormous, dark orbs staring hypnotically from beneath lashless lids.

This head was without human body. It rested upon a square machine, inside which its neck disappeared from view. And from inside that machine came a faint, ceaseless humming and throbbing.

"A human head!" muttered Ethan in repulsion of horror. "Kept alive for ages, by means of a mechanical heart and body!"

"You have guessed it, stranger," said the Wise One, its insane laughter breaking off, its hypnotic eyes searching the young American's face.

Its haunted voice held the three spellbound in the moonlit chamber.

"Yes, many, many ages ago I was a man like you, stranger," said the Wise One. There was a queer sob of heartbreak in its flat voice. "I walked in the sun and made love beneath the moon, I worked and slept and ate as other people did. Yes, I was human—once.

"But a vaulting, unholy ambition brought this terrible doom upon me. I was a scientist and I had found ways to keep the heads of animals alive, separate from their bodies, by means of mechanical hearts which pumped a synthetic blood-stream through the veins. I wanted to prove that a human head could be kept alive indefinitely in the same way. And so in mad rashness and pride of achievement, I volunteered to submit myself to the experiment.

"The thing was done. My head was severed from my body and attached to this mechanical trunk. I awoke from the operation, no longer a man, but merely a head, a living brain. And I have remained like this ever since, for I cannot die as long as my mechanical heart is kept functioning and my synthetic blood renewed.

"I have seen the generations of man be born and die, for thousands upon thousands of years. I have seen empires and civilizations rise to glory and sink in long decline. And with each year that passed, my wisdom and knowledge grew greater, for while other men had time only to learn the elements of knowledge before they died, I who was immortal could increase my wisdom endlessly.

"But I longed for death, stranger. For thousands on thousands of years I have longed to be free of this wretched mockery of existence and to sink into the blessed peace of death. I have prayed those around me for generations to give me death, but always they have refused.

"They would not kill me, because they wished to profit by my superhuman store of knowledge. They called me the Wise One. And the people who never saw me but worshipped me in awe, also called me the Wise One—me, the half-human thing praying for the release of death!"

A bitterness more than human throbbed in the Wise One's voice, chilled Ethan's brain.

"At last," continued the creature's haunted voice, "I saw a chance of death. This land of Tzar, as I have long known, is destined soon to sink beneath the sea, for its foundations have long been crumbling. Indeed, I think that end is very close at hand, now. I was happy when I learned that, for in that cataclysm I would find death.

"But now the horror of continued

life threatens me. Thorold, the king, seeks the secret of time-projection from the scientist Kim Idim, which will enable him to flee into future ages. And Thorold will take me with him, so that he may continue to profit by my wisdom. The blessed cup of death will be snatched from my thirsty lips!"

THE voice of the Wise One was rising wildly, the enormous eyes of the creature terribly distended.

"I knew the secret of the time-ray long before Kim Idim discovered it," the creature raged, "but I disclosed it to no one. But if Thorold gains that secret, my silence will be in vain. Even now Thorold is torturing Kim Idim to make him give up the secret, and show him how to operate the projector."

"My father!" cried Chiri, anguish breaking the spell of horror on her face. "Ethan, you must save him from Thorold's tortures!"

Ethan Drew, heart pounding, stepped closer to the monstrous figure of the Wise One.

"I will stop Thorold from obtaining that secret, if I can," he told the creature hoarsely. "Tell us where amid these halls we can find Thorold and Kim Idim, and I swear that I will kill Thorold."

The Wise One's enormous eyes considered the young American. Then those dark orbs flashed strangely.

"I will tell you where you can find them," said the monstrous thing, "but on one condition only."

"And what is that?" Ethan cried.

"On condition that as soon as I have told you, you kill me!" exclaimed the Wise One. "One stroke of your sword, and I shall be free forever of this travesty of life, safe forever in the arms of death."

Ethan recoiled. "God, I couldn't!"

"You must!" cried the Wise One. "Only if you agree will I tell you what you ask."

And suddenly, grotesquely, there were tears gleaming in the great eyes.

"Do not deny me death!" it whispered. "Do not deny me that for which I have prayed and hoped these thousands on thousands of years."

Ethan shuddered, but he forced himself to speak.

"I'll—I'll do it. Where are Thorold and Kim Idim?"

"In Thorold's torture-chamber, the fourth door along the third corridor," answered the Wise One swiftly. "At least three of Thorold's torturers will be with him, so you must strike quickly, stranger.

"And now—the death you promised me!" the creature cried.

Ethan advanced sickly, raising his sword. The great head looked up at the blade, eyes gleaming in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"I can't do it," Ethan said thickly.

"You promised!" cried the Wise One. "It will be an act of infinite mercy to me. Strike!"

Chiri and Pedro were watching in a trance of horror. Ethan raised his blade higher, and in the moment before he struck, involuntarily closed his eyes.

"Death!" he heard the Wise One whispering exultantly. "Death, at last——"

Ethan struck. He felt the blade crunch down through bone and flesh and clang against metal.

He opened his eyes, shuddering. He had cloven away the whole rear half of the hideous skull. But upon the dead white face of the Wise One was now a strange expression of peace.

"*Dios,* let us get out of here!" gasped the Spaniard. "This land—it is one of devils!"

Ethan was trembling violently as he stumbled with Chiri and the *conquistador* back out into the dusky corridors.

They hurried toward the third corridor away, then down along it until they came to the fourth door. The trio paused outside that closed door. A voice reached them from within—Thorold's bull voice.

"Will you tell now how the machine is operated?" demanded that voice.

"I—I will never tell you," quavered another, shaking voice. "You shall never escape with the Wise One into future times to work evil there."

"Give him another turn," they heard Thorold order. Then there was a sobbing cry from the tortured man.

Softly, soundlessly, Ethan Drew pushed open the door and stepped into the torture chamber.

5. The Hour of Destruction

IT WAS a dusky, red-lit room with a low stone ceiling. Weird, blood-chilling contrivances of torture stood about it, and three wolf-faced men—the torturers employed by the king of Tzar.

Thorold himself stood at the center of the chamber. His giant frame was bent eagerly forward, his dark, ruthless face and black eyes blazing as he watched his torturers at their gruesome work.

They had Kim Idim stretched upon a rack, his toes gripped by the rolls of a contrivance like a great wringer. The old man's white hair was disheveled, his thin face deathly white; his eyes seemed bulging from his sockets as the torturers slowly turned the rolls that gripped and crushed his feet.

"Now will you demonstrate the use of the projector?" Thorold demanded remorselessly.

He pointed as he spoke at a squat mechanism that stood at the side of the room, near a broad window overlooking the moonlit sea.

It was the time-ray projector that had snatched Ethan Drew and his five comrades out of their own ages. The mechanism was a squat complexity of deflection coils and tubes, upon which was mounted a world-globe graven with fine lines. There were vernier controls, and a big copper ring jutted from the bottom of the machine.

"No—not now or ever!" gasped Kim Idim.

The grinning torturers obeyed. Ethan saw the old Tzaran scientist's body arch up to his bonds convulsively from agony, as he and Lopez softly entered.

Chiri screamed. Thorold and the torturers whirled, drawing their swords.

Ethan rushed, red fury lighting his brain, straight at the Tzaran king. One of the torturers stepped between the two—and took the American's blade through his ribs before he could make a thrust.

As Ethan tore out the sword, Pedro was cutting down another of the startled torturers and then rushing upon the third.

"Guards!" yelled Thorold at the top of his voice as his sword clashed with Ethan's.

"They can't hear you," rasped the American. "This is just between us two."

With fierce, resistless attack, he forced Thorold back against the wall. A savage thrust and twist—and Thorold's blade flew from his hand.

Ethan tensed to lunge in the death stab. But at that moment the room, the whole vast building, rocked wildly about them.

He was flung from his feet. He heard Chiri cry out, and Pedro yell a startled curse. The terrible drum-roll of shifting rock was sounding again deep beneath the city, and the great pile of the Citadel was waving wildly beneath one earth-shock after another.

Ethan staggered to his feet on the quivering floor, and saw Thorold racing out the door.

"Guards!" the Tzaran tyrant was shouting in his bull voice as he ran down the corridors.

"After him!" Pedro cried fiercely, but Ethan held the *conquistador* back.

"No—no time now! We've got to get Kim Idim out before Thorold gets back with soldiers."

They could hear Thorold's great voice shouting for his warriors as he raced down into the lower levels.

Ethan whirled toward the old scientist. Chiri had slashed her father's bonds and was helping him to stand erect on his crushed feet.

"The men from the past!" exclaimed the old man, staring at Ethan and the Spaniard.

Every few moments, now, a new earth-shock was vibrating through the Citadel.

There were distant screams from the people who had been holding carnival in the streets far below. And the fearful grinding from deep in the earth was swelling louder and louder.

"Can you help your father to walk?" Ethan cried to the girl. "Lopez and I can carry the machine and there's still a chance we can get down through the Citadel."

"No—no chance now!" shouted the Spaniard from the door. "Here come the guards!"

Ethan raced to the door. A group of men were running down the dusky corridor toward them. The American and Pedro awaited them desperately with swords raised.

Then one of the men running toward them turned, leveled something. A ringing shot echoed in the shadowy hallway.

"Got that Injun!" yelled a familiar, nasal voice.

"Hank Martin!" Ethan cried. "And the others——"

It was the four they had left in the cellars of the Citadel. Swain's great axe was bloody now, and red-smeared too were the swords of Ptah and John Crewe.

"We heard Thorold a-yelling for his guards, so we figgered you were in trouble and came bustin' up here!" panted the trapper. "But they're after us—a hull tribe of them."

"They've got us trapped up here now—we can't get away," rasped Ptah calmly.

"Odin! what of that when there is good fighting ahead?" shouted Swain, his blue eyes blazing.

A MASS of armored men appeared in the farther end of the corridor, and Thorold's bull voice could be heard rallying them forward.

Another tremendous earth-shock rocked the building about them. The ominous grind of rock underground had now become a loud roar.

"The doom of Tzar is at hand!" cried Kim Idim. "Men from the past, I can send you back to your own times with this projector, if you can hold out Thorold and his men until I get it into operation."

"We'll try!" Ethan cried. "But hurry."

"Here they come!" yelled Hank Martin to Ethan, from out in the corridor.

His rifle cracked at the same mo-

ment. Then he clubbed the heavy weapon."

"Form a line across the corridor!" Ethan shouted as he joined them. "We must hold them back until Kim Idim gets the machine started."

Thorold was hurrying down the hallway at the head of a solid mass of guards. The soldiers were crazed with fear by the awful earth-shocks that each few moments were shaking the city, and Thorold was playing upon their panic.

"On, men!" the giant king was shouting. "Inside that room is the machine which will enable us to escape from doomed Tzar. Cut down these men who would keep us from it!"

The armored soldiers poured down the hall in a solid living wave—and then stopped.

In a line across that hallway, Ethan Drew and his five comrades were awaiting them. Four swords flashed like bolts of steel lightning. Hank Martin's rifle-butt crashed down, and Swain's great axe clove in red destruction.

Ethan, thrusting and stabbing like a madman, sought to reach Thorold with his sword, but the giant king was out of his reach. Howling, fear-mad warriors who saw their one chance of escape inside the room, kept coming forward, a delirium of wild faces in front of the battling American.

Hank Martin was crushing in skulls and faces like egg-shells with the butt of his heavy rifle, uttering a whooping Indian yell each time his iron-shop weapon smashed down.

"Dios!" Pedro swore as he hacked furiously. "Even Don Hernando never led us into a fight like this——"

John Crewe's massive face was flaming crimson as his broadsword flashed in great circles.

"Children of sin!" he was shouting. "Your cup of wickedness has run over —God's wrath is upon you!"

Ptah fought in vicious silence, his swarthy face immobile as a mask as he stabbed and smote with his heavy short-sword. But ever and again a weird, piercing cry arose from the huge viking.

"Aha!" his great voice yelled as his terrible axe smashed down amid the attackers. *"Aha!"*

The Tzaran warriors recoiled from that terrific defense. Bleeding from a dozen cuts, panting and covered with sweat, Ethan glanced around.

Kim Idim was toiling with the projector, fumbling with broken hands, held upright by the bravely encircling arms of Chiri.

"One minute more!" cried the old scientist hoarsely.

Thorold was yelling wildly to his men as new earth-shocks rocked the vast building. "On—they are but six! Cut them down or we sink to doom with Tzar!"

The solid wave of attack smashed back into the thin defending line. And again that line held—six weapons weaving an impassable barrier of death.

Maddened, foaming, Thorold forced forward. His heavy blade clashed that of Ethan, struck past it and pierced the American's left arm.

Heedless of the wound, Ethan stabbed with a low snarl. And his sword drove right through the armor over Thorold's heart. The Tzaran king staggered back, fell sprawling across the pile of bodies.

"You got him, pardner!" yelled Hank Martin exultantly.

"The land is sinking!" screamed a wild voice up through the Citadel.

For now the earth-shocks had become one continuous convulsion, and the great building, rocking like a leaf

in a wind, was slowly settling downward.

THE attackers in the corridor turned and fled in mad panic, seeking a way out of the building. Ethan spun around—and through the window saw the raging, maddened ocean running in mountainous waves that already were washing through the streets of the sinking, moonlit city.

"Doomsday—Jehovah's wrath descends on this accursed land!" yelled Crewe.

"It is Ragnarok!" shouted Swain. "The twilight of the gods!"

Kim Idim cried to them. "The projector is ready. Be quick! Step into the copper ring, one of you!"

"You first, Ptah!" cried Ethan.

The panting little Egyptian made as though to refuse to go first, then stepped into the low copper ring jutting from the bottom of the machine.

"Farewell, comrades!" he shouted.

Kim Idim swiftly moved the stylus touching the world-globe atop the machine, then touched a vernier, threw a switch. A flash of light inside the ring —and Ptah was gone. Then Swain went, waving his red axe in farewell.

Pedro was next. Ethan had to push the *conquistador* into the copper circle.

"Sangre de Cristo!" the Spaniard was exclaiming. "I wish——"

He was gone, before he could finish. As Kim Idim swiftly changed his controls, Ethan thrust John Crewe toward the machine. But the great Puritan resisted.

"It is not God's will that men should juggle with time," he cried. "I cannot——"

But by main force Ethan shoved him into the copper circle. Kim Idim had already made his adjustments for time and location. The Puritan, still protesting, vanished in the flash of light inside the ring.

"Quickly! Quickly!" cried Kim Idim, his voice almost inaudible amid the thunderous din.

For now, as with long, grinding roll of riven rock, the land of Tzar sank downward, the sea was raging in over the city. There was a crashing of falling walls.

Hank Martin, still gripping his long rifle, had stepped inside the ring.

"Good-bye, pardner!" he called to Ethan, a grin on his lanky, blood-smeared face.

Flash! And he was gone. And Kim Idim motioned Ethan wildly to enter the circle.

"What about you and Chiri?" Ethan demanded hoarsely, grasping the pale girl's arm. "I can't leave you here to die."

"We shall not die—I shall set the machine to hurl Chiri and me into a time a little farther ahead, when I have calculated that new lands will have arisen here!" Kim Idim shouted.

"If ever you need me, you'll know how to call me across time again!" Ethan cried. "Chiri, good-bye!"

A nearer, more ominous crashing sounded.

"The Citadel is beginning to collapse!" Kim Idim yelled.

Ethan loosed the girl, and leaped into the copper circle. The old man flung the switch.

There was a roar as the lower walls of the Citadel began to collapse. But even as that roar struck Ethan's ears, everything exploded in light and he was hurled into unconsciousness.

Epilog

HE AWOKE with hot sunlight beating upon his face. He lay upon burning sands, beneath the glare of a mid-

day silence. He could hear a chorus of receding, wild yells.

Ethan staggered up and looked dazedly around. He stood in the desert, the burning Sahara, at the very spot where he had been waiting for the Tuareg charge when he had been snatched into the future. Beside him lay the dead bodies of the other ambushed soldiers of the Foreign Legion patrol.

And a quarter-mile away, a horde of Arabs were riding off with wild yells of terror.

"By heaven, I understand now!" Ethan cried to himself. "Kim Idim sent me back to the identical place and almost the identical time from which he had drawn me. And that's what terrorized those Tuaregs who were charging me—to them, it was as though I vanished from sight for a moment, and then reappeared!"

He looked down wildly at himself. He was still covered with the blood and sweat of that terrific battle in the corridor.

"It was ten minutes ago—and yet it was a million years in the future!" he muttered numbly.

Ethan caught a wandering horse that had belonged to one of the Tuaregs slain in the fight. And soon he was riding across the burning sands, heading toward the French army post a score of miles away.

He would tell them only that his patrol had been ambushed, and all wiped out but himself. There was no use of trying to tell them what had really happened to him. No one would ever believe his story.

And in just the same way, he thought suddenly, Pedro and Swain, and Ptah and John Crewe and Hank Martin, must have got back to their own times, and been forced to keep silent about their incredible experience.

"The best comrades a man ever had," Ethan whispered as he rode. "And now they're all dead and gone, for centuries, even for thousands of years.

"No, it's not true! They're only separated from me by time. And Chiri and Kim Idim, in whatever far future age they fled to, they too are only separated from me by time."

Ethan's head straightened, and a worn smile came for the first time onto his haggard face.

"They're as real and living as I am, all of them. And maybe some day—some day——"

Introduction to a Stranger

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Death is a stranger in ragged attire;
His friendship and handclasp few mortals desire;
They shun him, avoid him and try to defeat him;
Yet slowly their steps take them forward to meet him.

"Beyond the Karthian hills lieth Onai, the city of lutes and dancing."

The Quest of Iranon

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

INTO the granite city of Teloth wandered the youth, vine-crowned, his yellow hair glistening with myrrh and his purple robe torn with briers of the mountain Sidrak that lies across the antique bridge of stone. The men of Teloth are dark and stern, and dwell in square houses, and with frowns they asked the stranger whence he had come and what were his name and fortune. So the youth answered:

"I am Iranon, and come from Aira, a far city that I recall only dimly but seek to find again. I am a singer of songs that I learned in the far city, and my calling is to make beauty with the things remembered of childhood. My wealth is in little memories and dreams, and in hopes that I sing in gardens when the moon is tender and the west wind stirs the lotus-buds."

When the men of Teloth heard these things they whispered to one another; for though in the granite city

there is no laughter or song, the stern men sometimes look to the Karthian hills in the spring and think of the lutes of distant Oonai whereof travelers have told. And thinking thus, they bade the stranger stay and sing in the square before the Tower of Mlin, though they liked not the color of his tattered robe, nor the myrrh in his hair, nor his chaplet of vine-leaves, nor the youth in his golden voice. At evening Iranon sang, and while he sang an old man prayed and a blind man said he saw a nimbus over the singer's head. But most of the men of Teloth yawned, and some laughed and some went away to sleep; for Iranon told nothing useful, singing only his memories, his dreams, and his hopes.

"I remember the twilight, the moon, and soft songs, and the window where I was rocked to sleep. And through the window was the street where the golden lights came, and where the shadows danced on houses of marble. I remember the square of moonlight on the floor, that was not like any other light, and the visions that danced in the moonbeams when my mother sang to me. And too, I remember the sun of morning bright above the many-colored hills in summer, and the sweetness of flowers borne on the south wind that made the trees sing.

"O Aira, city of marble and beryl, how many are thy beauties! How loved I the warm and fragrant groves across the hyaline Nithra, and the falls of the tiny Kra that flowed through the verdant valley! In those groves and in that vale the children wove wreaths for one another, and at dusk I dreamed strange dreams under the yath-trees on the mountain as I saw below me the lights of the city, and the curving Nithra reflecting a ribbon of stars.

"And in the city were palaces of veined and tinted marble, with golden domes and painted walls, and green gardens with cerulean pools and crystal fountains. Often I played in the gardens and waded in the pools, and lay and dreamed among the pale flowers under the trees. And sometimes at sunset I would climb the long hilly street to the citadel and the open place, and look down upon Aira, the magic city of marble and beryl, splendid in a robe of golden flame.

"Long have I missed thee, Aira, for I was but young when we went into exile; but my father was thy King and I shall come again to thee, for it is so decreed of Fate. All through seven lands have I sought thee, and some day shall I reign over thy groves and gardens, thy streets and palaces, and sing to men who shall know whereof I sing, and laugh not. For I am Iranon, who was a Prince in Aira."

THAT night the men of Teloth lodged the stranger in a stable, and in the morning an archon came to him and told him to go to the shop of Athok the cobbler, and be apprenticed to him.

"But I am Iranon, a singer of songs," he said, "and have no heart for the cobbler's trade."

"All in Teloth must toil," replied the archon, "for that is the law." Then said Iranon:

"Wherefore do ye toil; is it not that ye may live and be happy? And if ye toil only that ye may toil more, when shall happiness find you? Ye toil to live, but is not life made of beauty and song? And if ye suffer no singers among you, where shall be the fruits of your toil? Toil without song is like a weary journey without an end. Were not death more pleasing?" But the archon was sullen and did not understand, and rebuked the stranger.

"Thou art a strange youth, and I like not thy face or thy voice. The words thou speakest are blasphemy, for the gods of Teloth have said that toil is good. Our gods have promised us a haven of life beyond death, where there shall be rest without end, and crystal coldness amidst which none shall vex his mind with thought or his eyes with beauty. Go thou then to Athok the cobbler or be gone out of the city by sunset. All here must serve, and song is folly."

So Iranon went out of the stable and walked over the narrow stone streets between the gloomy square houses of granite, seeking something green, for all was of stone. On the faces of men were frowns, but by the stone embankment along the sluggish river Zuro sate a young boy with sad eyes gazing into the waters to spy green budding branches washed down from the hills by the freshets. And the boy said to him: "Art thou not indeed he of whom the archons tell, who seekest a far city in a fair land? I am Romnod, and born in the blood of Teloth, but am not old in the ways of the granite city, and yearn daily for the warm groves and the distant lands of beauty and song. *Beyond the Karthian hills lieth Oonai, the city of lutes and dancing, which men whisper of and say is both lovely and terrible.* Thither would I go were I old enough to find the way, and thither shouldst thou go and thou wouldst sing and have men listen to thee. Let us leave the city Teloth and fare together among the hills of spring. Thou shalt show me the ways of travel and I will attend thy songs at evening when the stars one by one bring dreams to the minds of dreamers. And peradventure it may be that Oonai the city of lutes and dancing is even the fair Aira thou seekest, for it is told that thou hast not known Aira since old days, and a name often changeth. Let us go to Oonai, O Iranon of the golden head, where men shall know our longings and welcome us as brothers, nor ever laugh or frown at what we say." And Iranon answered:

"Be it so, small one; if any in this stone place yearn for beauty he must seek the mountains and beyond, and I would not leave thee to pine by the sluggish Zuro. But think not that delight and understanding dwell just across the Karthian hills, or in any spot thou canst find in a day's, or a year's, or a lustrum's journey. Behold, when I was small like thee I dwelt in the valley of Narthos by the frigid Xari, where none would listen to my dreams; and I told myself that when older I would go to Sinara on the southern slope, and sing to smiling dromedarymen in the market place. But when I went to Sinara I found the dromedarymen all drunken and ribald, and saw that their songs were not as mine; so I travelled in a barge down the Xari to onyx-walled Jaren. And the soldiers at Jaren laughed at me and drave me out, so that I wandered to other cities.

"I have seen Stethelos that is below the great cataract, and have gazed on the marsh where Sarnath once stood. I have been to Thraa, Ilarnek, and Kadatheron on the winding river Ai, and have dwelt long in Olathoë in the land of Lomar. But though I have had listeners sometimes, they have ever been few, and I know that welcome shall wait me only in Aira, the city of marble and beryl where my father once ruled as King. So for Aira shall we seek, though it were well to visit distant and lute-blessed Oonai across the Karthian hills, which may indeed be Aira, though I think not. Aira's beauty is past imagining, and none can tell of

it without rapture, whilst of Oonai the camel-drivers whisper leeringly."

AT THE sunset Iranon and small Romnod went forth from Teloth, and for long wandered amidst the green hills and cool forests. The way was rough and obscure, and never did they seem nearer to Oonai the city of lutes and dancing; but in the dusk as the stars came out Iranon would sing of Aira and its beauties and Romnod would listen, so that they were both happy after a fashion. They ate plentifully of fruit and red berries, and marked not the passing of time, but many years must have slipped away. Small Romnod was now not so small, and spoke deeply instead of shrilly, though Iranon was always the same, and decked his golden hair with vines and fragrant resins found in the woods. So it came to pass one day that Romnod seemed older than Iranon, though he had been very small when Iranon had found him watching for green budding branches in Teloth beside the sluggish stone-banked Zura.

Then one night when the moon was full the travellers came to a mountain crest and looked down upon the myriad lights of Oonai. Peasants had told them they were near, and Iranon knew that this was not his native city of Aira. The lights of Oonai were not like those of Aira; for they were harsh and glaring, whilst the lights of Aira shine as softly and magically as shone the moonlight on the floor by the window where Iranon's mother once rocked him to sleep with song. But Oonai was a city of lutes and dancing; so Iranon and Romnod went down the steep slope that they might find men to whom songs and dreams would bring pleasure. And when they were come into the town they found rose-wreathed revellers bound from house to house and leaning from windows and balconies, who listened to the songs of Iranon and tossed him flowers and applauded when he was done. Then for a moment did Iranon believe he had found those who thought and felt even as he, though the town was not an hundredth so fair as Aira.

When dawn came Iranon looked about with dismay, for the domes of Oonai were not golden in the sun, but gray and dismal. And the men of Oonai were pale with revelling, and dull with wine, and unlike the radiant men of Aira. But because the people had thrown him blossoms and acclaimed his songs Iranon stayed on, and with him Romnod, who liked the revelry of the town and wore in his dark hair roses and myrtle. Often at night Iranon sang to the revellers, but he was always as before, crowned only with the vine of the mountains and remembering the marble streets of Aira and the hyaline Nithra. In the frescoed halls of the monarch did he sing, upon a crystal dais raised over a floor that was a mirror, and as he sang, he brought pictures to his hearers till the floor seemed to reflect old, beautiful and half-remembered things instead of the wine-reddened feasters who pelted him with roses. And the King bade him put away his tattered purple, and clothed him in satin and cloth-of-gold, with rings of green jade and bracelets of tinted ivory, and lodged him in a gilded and tapestried chamber on a bed of sweet carven wood with canopies and coverlets of flower-embroidered silk. Thus dwelt Iranon in Oonai, the city of lutes and dancing.

It is not known how long Iranon tarried in Oonai, but one day the King brought to the palace some wild whirling dancers from the Liranian desert.

and dusky flute-players from Drinen in the East, and after that the revellers threw their roses not so much at Iranon as at the dancers and the flute-players. And day by day that Romnod who had been a small boy in granite Teloth grew coarser and redder with wine, till he dreamed less and less, and listened with less delight to the songs of Iranon. But though Iranon was sad he ceased not to sing, and at evening told again his dreams of Aira, the city of marble and beryl. Then one night the reddened and fattened Romnod snored heavily amidst the poppied silks of his banquet-couch and died writhing, whilst Iranon, pale and slender, sang to himself in a far corner. And when Iranon had wept over the grave of Romnod and strewn it with green budding branches, such as Romnod used to love, he put aside his silks and gauds and went forgotten out of Oonai the city of lutes and dancing clad only in the ragged purple in which he had come, and garlanded with fresh vines from the mountains.

Into the sunset wandered Iranon, seeking still for his native land and for men who would understand and cherish his songs and dreams. In all the cities of Cydathria and in the lands beyond the Bnazic desert gay-faced children laughed at his olden songs and tattered robe of purple; but Iranon stayed ever young, and wore wreaths upon his golden head whilst he sang of Aira.

So came he one night to the squalid cot of an antique shepherd, bent and dirty, who kept flocks on a stony slope above a quicksand marsh. To this man Iranon spoke, as to so many others:

"Canst thou tell me where I may find Aira, the city of marble and beryl, where flows the hyaline Nithra and where the falls of the tiny Kra sing to verdant valleys and hills forested with yath trees?" And the shepherd, hearing, looked long and strangely at Iranon, as if recalling something very far away in time, and noted each line of the stranger's face, and his golden hair, and his crown of vine leaves. But he was old, and replied:

"O stranger, I have indeed heard the name of Aira, and the other names thou hast spoken, but they come to me from afar down the waste of long years. I heard them in my youth from the lips of a playmate, a beggar's boy given to strange dreams, who would weave long tales about the moon and the flowers and the west wind. We used to laugh at him, for we knew him from his birth though he thought himself a King's son. He was comely, even as thou, but full of folly and strangeness; and he ran away when small to find those who would listen gladly to his songs and dreams. How often hath he sung to me of lands that never were, and things that never can be! Of Aira did he speak much; of Aira and the river Nithra, and the falls of the tiny Kra. There would he ever say he once dwelt as a Prince, though here we knew him from his birth. Nor was there ever a marble city of Aira, or those who could delight in strange songs, save in the dreams of mine old playmate Iranon who is gone."

And in the twilight, as the stars came out one by one and the moon cast on the marsh a radiance like that which a child sees quivering on the floor as he is rocked to sleep at evening, there walked into the lethal quicksands a very old man in tattered purple, crowned with withered vine leaves and gazing ahead as if upon the golden domes of a fair city where dreams are understood.

That night something of youth and beauty died in the elder world.

"On the silver screen the skinny talon could be seen reaching for the handle of the leaf-switch."

The Stratosphere Menace

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

A brief scientific story of a terrible doom that threatened all mankind with destruction

COLONEL ROYCE, the Commandant at Maxwell Field, sat in his office, and heaved a sigh of relief. Through the open window he could see the parade-ground and the shiny sphere of duralumin which was to carry Brigaud and his scientific instruments into the stratosphere. Above it the flabby gas-bag wobbled in the listless summer air. From the door of the sphere projected the rear end and legs of a soldier in well-bleached olive-drab cottons. Others in blue dungarees were tightening stays and testing the release-trips of the ballast-bags.

The electric fan on Colonel Royce's desk droned a monotonous seesaw tune. Royce stared with resentment at the television set which stood beside it. Soon the French scientist would be in the air—and *on* the air as well—and then the fan would have to be switched off, lest its static interfere with the broadcast.

Colonel Royce loosened his collar, and ran a handkerchief around inside the neckband of his olive-drab shirt, then looked across the sun-baked turf toward the stratosphere balloon. Brigaud's thin face, with its black pointed mustachios and goatee, was now peering out through the port-hole of the silver ball.

A heavy-set soldier in sergeant's stripes stood near the opening. Something white was handed out to him, the cover was carried up by two privates and battered on, and the attending soldiers began to loose the guy-ropes.

Colonel Royce swung away from the window in his swivel chair, and switched off the fan. Then he pushed one of the buttons on the corner of his desk. The door opened and the Adjutant entered, saluting stiffly.

"Send for the Signal Corps Officer," said Royce, returning the salute. "Then call all the staff in here to listen to Brigaud's broadcast."

The Adjutant saluted and departed. A moment later a Second Lieutenant with crossed-flag insignia came in, saluted absent-mindedly, and going directly to the television set began to adjust controls.

Presently the heavy-set stolid Sergeant who had been standing near the balloon, entered and announced with a snappy salute, "Sir, Sergeant O'Rourke has the Adjutant's permission to speak to the Commanding Officer."

He was breathing heavily, and the Colonel could see that beneath his soldierly precision O'Rourke was visibly agitated.

"Please, sir, Professor Brigaud gave me a note to the newscaster of the A. B. C. Network, sir. Told me not to deliver it until he was well up in the sky. But it all sounds fishy to me, sir, so I took the liberty of bringing it to the Commandant at once, sir."

He handed an envelope to the Colonel. The address, in precise French penmanship, read: "To the newscaster of the A. B. C. Network, Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama."

Obviously Colonel Royce had not been intended to see this letter. But something of Sergeant O'Rourke's breathless worry had infected the Colonel. He tore off one end of the envelope, and hastily pulled out the contents. It read:

Pig! You refused to broadcast my flight into the stratosphere because you say that the mere gathering of meteorological data is not news. Bah! Well, then, I shall give you some news.

I AM GOING TO DESTROY THE EARTH!

How do I do it? Very simple. Hydrogen replaces the nitrogen of the air at far heights. At 61.68 kilometers, the ratio is two of hydrogen to one of oxygen. A spark applied to a mixture in that proportion will explode the entire stratosphere and wreck the earth. I intend to apply a spark when I reach that high.

Is that news, Mr. Broadcaster?

So tune in, and let the peoples hear my laugh, and see me throw the switch which shall destroy the world.

PIERRE BRIGAUD, I. D.

The Colonel chewed his lip with a puzzled frown. Absurd! Preposterous! And yet——. He glanced up at Sergeant O'Rourke, and caught the worried look in the face of that perfect soldier.

"Here, Lieutenant," he shouted to the Signal Corps Officer, who was still fussing with the controls of the television set; "read this quickly, and tell me if it is possible."

The young officer ran his eye rapidly over its contents. His face blanched as he claimed, "My God, sir, it *is* possible!"

COLONEL ROYCE stared at him for a moment. Then whirling, he vaulted out through the open window, and

raced as fast as his old legs would carry his heavy body, toward the balloon.

"Stop! Stop! Hold that balloon! Wait!" he bellowed.

But just then the last rope came free. The silver ball quivered, began its slow and swaying ascent in the listless summer air. Colonel Royce came to a panting, chagrined halt, glaring up at the duralumin sphere and the gas-bag wobbling above it. O'Rourke joined him.

"Quick, Sergeant, your pistol!" Royce shouted.

O'Rourke flipped it out of its holster and handed it over, butt forward. Royce snatched it, rapidly discharging all seven shots at the balloon.

Like an echo in the distance, they heard the staccato bark of a three-inch anti-aircraft gun. Far aloft, two thousand feet or so, was an airplane towing a sleeve-target. Tiny puffs of white smoke appeared all about the target against the background of blue sky.

Colonel Royce's fleshy face was purple. Knotted veins stood out on his neck and great beads of sweat formed on his forehead. For a moment he stared at the rising balloon, then at the distant airplane and towed target.

"Quick!" he shouted. "My side-car!"

As if by magic, it came roaring up.

"Please, sir," Sergeant O'Rourke was saying, "I took the liberty of ordering the Colonel's car. I thought the Colonel might be needing it."

Royce was already clambering in. "Drive like the devil! To the anti-aircraft battalion!"

Down the concrete road sped the Colonel and his driver, then careened off sharply to the left onto a bumpy dirt road. The Colonel jounced up and down, steadying himself with his hands. The keen eyes in his apoplectic face followed the airplane, which by now had turned and was dragging its target across the artillery range.

The motorcycle skidded to a dusty stop fifty feet or so behind the four guns. The sound-ranger, with its four huge receiving trumpets, was being slowly turned by two soldiers with earphones on their heads. Other men were operating various aiming-machines which caused the four guns to follow automatically and exactly the flight of the target.

Vaulting out of his side-car, Colonel Royce roared, "Cease tracking!—Target, that balloon!"

The din of the bombardment instantly stopped, and the gun-crews turned as a man to face the newcomers.

Captain Melton, C. A. C., came running up. He saluted, flashed one glance at the rising balloon, then stared incredulously at his superior.

"But, sir," he began, "I am responsible for this battery, and——"

"And I'm in command of this post!" Royce cut in. "That crazy Frenchman is planning to explode the stratosphere—do you hear? He'll destroy the world. I *command* you! Open fire!"

The balloon, still slowly rising, was now drifting past in front of them.

"My God, man!" shrieked the Colonel. "Look at it! A perfect target!"

Falling back a pace, Captain Melton eyed his frantic superior through narrowed lids. He scowled, shook his head almost imperceptibly, and began, "Now, Colonel——"

But Royce interrupted him. "Melton, for—don't try to soothe me. There's no time to lose! Open fire!"

"Please, sir," Captain Melton replied belligerently, "I was taught at West Point that if commanded to do anything illegal, it is an officer's duty to disobey his superior."

Colonel Royce's heavy body sagged

perceptibly. The color drained from his cheeks, then swept back again in a flood.

With a momentary burst of renewed vigor, he exclaimed, "You young whelp! I always said that that damned rule would make trouble some day! Listen, you idiot. I'll waste the necessary time to explain it to you. Professor Brigaud left a letter, which we intercepted. Get that? A letter! It stated that when he reaches the height where the ratio of hydrogen to oxygen is two to one, he intends to ignite the stratosphere, explode it, and destroy the world. *Now,* damn you, will you open fire?"

"Have you the letter?" Captain Melton pointedly inquired.

With growing chagrin, Colonel Royce rapidly felt of the pockets of his blouse, one by one. His jaw dropped. He stammered, "Why—er—no."

"Ah," said Captain Melton, meaningly.

Just then a second side-car roared up. Sergeant O'Rourke leaped out. He ran over, saluting. "Did the Colonel wish the letter? I took the liberty of bringing it, sir."

Snatching it from the Sergeant's hand, Royce handed it over to Captain Melton.

"Read it, quick!" he commanded. "The balloon is drifting out of range."

Melton read it. He scowled, read it again, and shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm sorry——"

"But I tell you," the Colonel implored, "the Signal Officer says that it's perfectly possible!"

"Where *is* the Signal Officer?" Melton asked pointedly.

"Please, sirs," Sergeant O'Rourke cut in, "I took the liberty of sending for him. Here he is now."

A third side-car drew up in a cloud of dust, and the Signal Officer dismounted.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Colonel Royce devoutly. "Evans, tell this young fool that the Brigaud letter is the truth."

"It is. I swear it is," the newcomer panted.

The expression on Captain Melton's face was still incredulous. "Then why doesn't lightning set off the stratosphere?"

"Lightning never gets as high as sixty-one kilometers. You see——"

"Or meteors?"

"The air is so thin at that height that meteors do not begin to glow until they drop lower."

THE Colonel's face was purpling again. He swept one hand across in front of him, as though to brush the two other officers aside. "For heaven's sake stop that childish chatter, and get going!"

Captain Melton galvanized with sudden resolution. Turning and running toward his battery, he shouted, "Target—that balloon! Commence firing!"

The men leaped to their stations. As fast as the loader could set the nose-fuses and slam the cartridges into the breeches of the four guns, shell after shell went screaming up into the blue. A few seconds later, white puffs of smoke began to form in a cluster to one side of the floating balloon.

Captain Melton, now calmly in full command of himself and his battery, observed through his binoculars.

"A technical hit, sir." He removed his glass and smiled proudly at Royce.

The Colonel stared at the young Captain with shocked and incredulous surprise, then shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"It'll take more than a *technical* hit to bring Brigaud down," he snorted disgustedly. "This isn't target practise! Look here, Melton, that damned balloon is 'way above your bursts!"

Captain Melton dropped his arms to his sides resignedly, and shook his head. "No use," he moaned. "It's out of range. I know when I'm licked, sir."

"Well, *I* don't," snapped Royce. "I'll send up a plane."

He turned to Sergeant O'Rourke, lips parting to issue a command.

"Please, sir," interjected the Sergeant, "I took the liberty of suggesting that they warm up a plane, sir. I thought the Colonel might be needing one."

Clambering into the seat of his side-car, Royce shouted, "To the hangars!" And the cavalcade of three side-cars set out at breakneck speed back to the flying-field.

A small pursuit-plane waited, with its propeller already spinning and the pilot in his seat with machine-gun cradled. Major Phelps, in command of the flight squadron, required no persuading.

The chocks were pulled away, the motor speeded to a roar, and the plane took off. Slanting upward, it sped toward the gray bag rising in the distant sky.

As they watched it go, Colonel Royce mumbled aloud to himself, "Absurd as this seems, it is more serious than war; for, unless that machine-gunner succeeds in his mission, we shall all be dead in a few hours. Come on over to my office, and let's tune in on Brigaud. My, but it's a hot day!"

At Headquarters the Signal Officer stepped at once to the controls of the television set. Soon a pattern of concentric circles appeared on the silver screen, blended into one another, and became the grinning face of the little Frenchman, backed by the interior of the duralumin car of the stratosphere balloon.

"Well, *Messieurs,*" spoke the loud-speaker, "I see your plane approaching me. All in good time I shall dispose of it. Meanwhile, I should like to address the peoples of the world."

"O'Rourke!" Sudden concern flooded the Commandant's ample face. "Did you give that letter of Brigaud's to the A. B. C. man?"

"No, sir. I took the liberty of not doing so. Here it is, sir."

Sighing, Colonel Royce slumped back in his swivel-chair. "No need to alarm the world," he muttered. "If they die, they die. Why frighten them?"

Meanwhile Brigaud, on silver screen and loud-speaker, was giving a long dissertation on the high degree of explosiveness of hydrogen and oxygen, when commingled in exactly the water-ratio of two to one.

"There is not a possibility for any life on earth to escape," he was saying; "for when I ignite the oxy-hydro mixture at 61,680 meters, the detonation will completely encircle the world, stunning to death every living being. And if, by chance, a few individuals survive, the millions of tons of water formed aloft by the sudden combining of H_2O will fall in one mass like a cloud-burst, flattening everything under its impact, and then sweeping everything out to sea."

"But we are forgetting our plane," interrupted Major Evans hopefully. "It should be reaching Brigaud just about now. And then—pouf!"

"And if it doesn't, then—pouf!" tensely remarked one of the others.

As if joining in the conversation, the voice of the French scientist came out

of the loud-speaker, saying, "Your plane approaches. I shall focus my television transmitter on it."

The silver screen blurred, then cleared to show the head-on picture of a distant plane. "And now observe, *Messieurs.*"

THE listeners in the Commandant's office gripped the arms of their chairs and leaned forward. They could faintly hear the drone of the plane, coming out of the loud-speaker. But abruptly this noise ceased, to be replaced by that most soul-chilling of all sounds, the whine of a falling aircraft whose motor has been cut off; and the plane dived down out of the picture. Everyone shuddered. The Air Corps Major passed his hand across his eyes.

With tight lips and set jaws, they listened as the voice from the loud-speaker explained, "It was very simple, *Messieurs.* Merely the ignition-stopping device of the French army, focussed on the plane. She sparks no more. The motor stops. *Comme ça!*" They could hear the snap of his fingers, which punctuated this remark.

"Damn it, men!" ejaculated Colonel Royce; "there must be *something* we can do! Lieutenant, are you sure that Brigaud's theory is correct?"

"I wish to God I were not, sir. At 61,680 meters there is 14.36 percent of hydrogen, and 7.18 percent of oxygen. Exactly two to one, the most explosive mixture possible, all set to detonate and turn into tons of water, just as Brigaud has stated!"

"But that still leaves nearly 80 percent of nitrogen, doesn't it?" Colonel Royce objected hopefully. "And nitrogen is non-inflammable and non-explosive."

Everyone turned strained eyes toward the two speakers. But the Signal Corps Lieutenant grimly shook his head.

"That makes no difference, sir. Merely dilutes the mixture."

"But the air is greatly rarefied at that height, isn't it?"

"Even that should make no difference, sir."

"Well, then, for heaven's sake, think of *something!*" the Colonel shouted.

Again the grim circle sat, immersed in thought. But no ideas came.

"Hello, everybody," came the cheerful taunting voice out of the loud-speaker. "I can well imagine that every radio-set on the American continent, and perhaps in Europe and Asia as well, is now tuned in on the A. B. C. Network, to watch and hear me destroy the world."

"We've fooled him there," Colonel Royce snarled. "It's all being wasted on just us!"

"Sixty kilometers," the face on the screen gleefully announced. "Man has never been that high into the stratosphere before, and man will never go that high again; for man will have ceased to exist. You see this leaf-switch? When I close this switch, a hot electric arc will form between two terminals on the outside of my globe, and will ignite the stratosphere. Pierre Brigaud is about to have his revenge."

Sergeant O'Rourke heaved a deep sigh. An inscrutable smile spread over his stolid Irish face.

"Sixty-one thousand," announced the loud-speaker. "Sixty-one thousand one hundred.—Two hundred.—Three hundred.—Four hundred.—Five hundred.—Six hundred.—Sixty one thousand, *six hundred,* and EIGHTY."

THE voice of the crazy Frenchman rose to an eery shriek. On the silver screen his skinny talon could be seen

reaching for the handle of the leaf-switch.

Colonel Royce set his jaw and braced himself. He glanced around the room. Everyone else was likewise braced. One Second Lieutenant had his fingers on his ears. Another young fellow had his head on his arms, sobbing.

Pierre Brigaud, on the television screen, seemed to take an eon to close the switch; but at last he thrust it shut with a vicious shove. His grinning face turned toward them, with a look of mad triumph in his eyes.

Nothing happened.

There was a tense silence. Brigaud's expression of triumph gradually changed to one of dismay.

"Sacré nom de Dieu!" came his voice, and it had a raucous falsetto break in it.

Brigaud's image on the silver screen wheeled and jammed the switch frantically in and out several times.

Still nothing happened.

When his face turned back once more toward his audience, the Frenchman was staring-eyed with fury, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a hideous snarl.

"Think not that you have escaped my wrath!" hissed the loud-speaker. "See, here is paper." He crumpled up a big ball of notepaper, and held it to view. "And here are matches." He exhibited them, too.

He struck a match and lit the ball of paper. Its flickering flames augmented the devilish appearance of his mustached and goateed thin countenance.

With the flaming ball of paper in one hand, he turned and groped for a lever. The port-hole swung outward.

The burst of an explosion showed on the silver screen. But from the loud-speaker there came, instead of a bang, merely a sickening squishy sound.

The scene on the television set cleared, but the screen was now covered with spots and blobs which nearly obscured the view. And between these spots, there could be made out the interior of Brigaud's sphere, likewise blotched and spotted, and a shapeless mass of flesh lying on the floor of the sphere.

THE Signal Officer broke the awed silence. "Of c-course. Brigaud swelled up and burst with the sudden release of pressure when he opened the port. And the out-draft extinguished his torch!"

A sigh swept around the Colonel's office.

All the officers slumped back in their seats. They began to mop their foreheads and necks with sticky handkerchiefs.

"But what I don't see," mused Colonel Royce, his large face white with relief, "is why Brigaud's electric arc failed to work."

"May it please the Colonel, sir," Sergeant O'Rourke murmured in evident embarrassment, "when I checked over the Frog's wiring, sir, I found some wires which seemed unnecessary for any good purpose, sir. So I took the liberty of disconnecting them, sir."

An awed silence, as the assembled officers stared first at Sergeant O'Rourke, and then at the Commandant.

"Colonel Royce," blurted one of the young Lieutenants, beaming, "you're all right!"

Sergeant O'Rourke's blue Irish eyes filled with admiration for his superior. "May I congratulate the Colonel?" he asked diffidently.

Colonel Royce drew himself up proudly, as the officers crowded forward to shake his hand.

"The long claw-like hands reached for his throat."

Smoke Fantasy

By THOMAS R. JORDAN

What was that grisly creature seen in the swirls of smoke from Sanderson's cigarette?

THE hour hand was close on to one o'clock, and Sanderson was still working on his latest story. His reading-lamp was the only light burning in the lonely house, and shadows clustered in the corners of the library waiting for their chance to be rulers of the night.

Something had happened to Sanderson's power of imagination. In the past, it had never been difficult to describe his characters, regardless of their position in the plot. He now found himself unable to describe the man who was to be the central figure of his tale; a man of cruel and wanton deeds, black of soul and hard of heart, a man of unnatural and sadistic desires, capable of a multitude of evils. But the appearance and build of this man still eluded him, and his features seemed only a blur in the mind's eye of the writer.

It might be because he had written so many stories of a similar nature that his mind was unable to produce an original description and he found himself facing a blank wall. Always his stories had been grotesque and weird, woven around men and women possessing strange and terrible qualities.

Sanderson was confronted with a frenzied thought. Perhaps he had lost the knack of twisting words and phrases so that the reader would get a clear picture of the characters described. If such a thing had happened he would have to find some way to help him restore that faculty.

He paced to the window and looked out into the night, watching the rain

patter gently on the ground outside, seeking for an inspiration. The darkness yielded nothing and only seemed to mock him as he strained for a suitable picture of the man he was trying to visualize.

The smoke from his cigarette on the ash-tray drifted idly into a corner and formed into a billowy cloud. As he stared at it he suddenly thought that here was a way to reach his goal. If he could imagine that his character was sitting there, hidden by the smoke, perhaps he could materialize a picture of him from the mist, as one imagines visions and palaces in the clouds on a windy day.

Sanderson seated himself in his chair and peered into the blue billows. A ragged wisp of smoke jutting out from the thick mist could be his hair, unkempt and tangled, like that of a madman. One section was dividing from the rest in a long angular streamer to the right, forming an imaginary arm, and he could almost make out two indistinct legs at the foot, with another arm making itself manifest on the other side.

But his attempts at conjuring a face and body from the vapors were difficult. In vain he concentrated on the upper portion of the fog in an attempt to create in his imagination the lines and expressions of a countenance. Suddenly, success began to reward his efforts.

He could barely discern a pair of eyes, wild and inflamed, staring from the mist, while whirls of smoke eddied around them, wider and wider, until a long evil nose was revealed.

The face was beginning to disclose itself more clearly when he became aware that the body had taken a definite form, long and lean with a sinuous strength to it that reminded Sanderson of a great cat. It sat in the chair in a tensed forward position as if ready to spring. One long arm hung at his side while the other gripped the back of the chair for support.

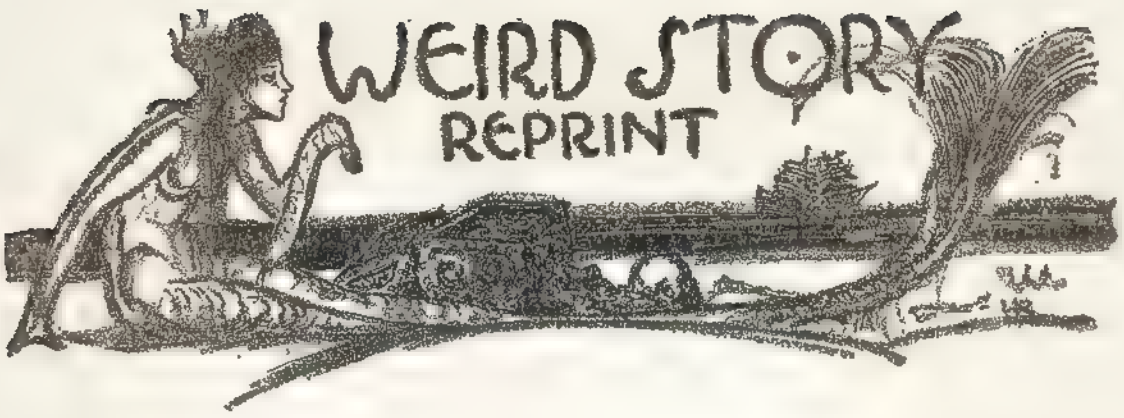
Sanderson's delighted gaze returned to the face. Clear and evil it now stood out, the mouth vicious and hard, leering at him with diabolical cunning, while sharp deep lines ran up from the corners of its mouth. Similar lines creased the uncouth forehead into a permanent scowl and the bulging eyes still stared crazily.

The vision was perfect, and the writer closed his eyes for a moment, phrasing sentences of description and feeling a surge of confidence flow through him. His character was perfect in every detail and now he could go ahead on his story with a new confidence in his powers of imagination.

He opened his eyes to find that the vision had not left. It sat there in the corner, clearer than ever, and it seemed to him that the mouth was working in a grimace of hate. A wave of fear swept through Sanderson and he wondered if his mind had deserted him. The figure was now rising, eddies of smoke still clinging to it, and an evil vitality made itself manifest to the writer, for it was now striding toward him with quick, cat-like movements.

It had all happened so quickly that Sanderson was unable to get out of his chair before the thing was on him. The long claw-like hands reached for his throat and the air was instantly cut off. He made a frantic, futile struggle to loosen that relentless grasp, and all the time those mad eyes stared mercilessly into his own.

The last thing that Sanderson sensed before pain-pierced blackness enveloped him was the faint odor of his cigarette, still burning in the ash-tray.



The Devils of Po Sung

By BASSETT MORGAN

OF ALL wealth abounding in Papua for the man who risks its myriad perils and keeps faith with the under-dogs of trade channels by which pearls and Paradise skins flow forth, Captain McTeague preferred pearls. He was a connoisseur and could state at sight and with remarkable accuracy the natal place of a nest of pearls. On the somewhat sketchy charts of tortuous outlines of the evilly lovely black sphinx of the South Seas he had painstakingly marked the location of more prolific sources of those translucent drops of tinted glory, and the finest came from a lagoon on the north coast guarded by an unspoiled, therefore indomitable tribe under the rule of Tukmoo.

In ports which splash the transient whitewash of civilization on the Papuan sea rims, it was said that Tukmoo's warriors had never met defeat; that as sorcerer, Tukmoo devised ingenious tortures that were the envy of his rivals; that he it was who punished infidelity of women by having them devour facial features of their lovers uncooked and sliced from the living victim, who was staked to the ground, and both were sentenced to the dreadful palm death which takes days of frightful agony, within sight and sound of each other.

Captain McTeague did not doubt the tales told of Tukmoo until he inquired for pearls from old Quong Yick, the Chinese who got them in exchange for alarm clocks, beads, printed silks and tin dippers, and the old trader cast the first shadow of suspicion on the hitherto gleaming hellishness of Tukmoo's intrepidity.

"Tukmoo no got. Long time he no got. He ver' sick in his liver for why he no got. He say heap debbil-debbil have got lagoon. He make plenty magic but no can do drive out debbil. Me no savvy. Maybe go look-see."

When he went north to Sarong for gum-dammar, it would not be much out of his course for Captain McTeague to investigate for himself the reason of the dearth of Tukmoo's fine pearls. McTeague headed his schooner toward that red mark on his chart which designated the best pearl lagoon known from the Curlews to the Solomons.

Starting with a sulfur-yellow sky and dead calm from which the wind

* From WEIRD TALES for December, 1927.

moaned as it arose and lashed the Banda Sea to fury, a storm drove him from his course and delayed his arrival. With the gray seas still pursuing in hump-backed fury, McTeague saw another craft storm-harried as his own but making remarkable speed in the tail of a typhoon which had kept him on deck for forty-eight hours. She was slender and rakish, black as the hells she came from, with lurid storm-red flashes of light on her pugnacious brass guns. She seemed to be headed for some harbor until McTeague hove in sight, then she veered about as if on patrol. When he drove in closer there was a burst of white smoke, a low "boom" and the scream of a shot ricocheting too close for risking a second aim of her gunner. Captain McTeague promptly turned tail, cursing his own carelessness in not learning more about the debbil-debbils which put fear into the heart of the dauntless and devilish Tukmoo. That grim streak of a craft fast swallowed by coast shadow was manned by oily Mascats, head-hunting Dyaks and God alone knew what mixture of human wolves; but any and all of them merely spineless innocents compared with their master, who had made his own name the terror of the Banda.

McTeague knew as much as any other man about Po Sung. He was a Mongolian tainted with the worst of other strains of heritage. He spoke excellent English, was suave in company of Europeans and had so huge a grasp of trade that he was a valued confidant of port merchants and diplomats for some years while he perfected his own sovereignty in hidden realms of wealth. Po Sung was like a giant octopus with tentacles reaching to every compass point. Now that he was growing old he had brazenly disdained the guise of decency and took his true colors, secure from vengeance in some backwater shelter where he devised and executed his schemes unmolested. Captain McTeague wished he had not run across Po Sung.

He would have headed out and away; only the storm had strained his schooner and snapped off a few spars and he needed to seek shelter and make repairs, especially as the barometer which rose promisingly had suffered a relapse, presaging a flash-back of storm.

At sunset, luridly furious behind the crouching black spine of Papuan hills, he headed the schooner into a lagoon and dropped anchor and was not surprised to be wakened shortly after he turned in by drums of the jungle talking in purring spurts and long tattoo rolls. His arrival was being broadcast by black men in the same manner in which their forebears had communicated news of the epochal upheavals of world inundation, the sunken Lemuria and Atlantis. The night was pregnant with menacing growl of drums, and a grimmer dawn poured opalescent light over a lagoon alert with darting canoes, slender as arrows, heralding the arrival of the sorcerer Tukmoo.

AS THE sorcerer's canoe shot alongside the schooner, McTeague saw that Tukmoo wore a necklace of pearls large as his finger ends, strung between human incisor teeth. He was plumed and painted, covered from forehead to heel with blue lace of tattooing beaded with cicatrices. A scarlet loin-cloth supported a club knobbed with human knuckle-bones. The forty paddles stabbed the water as one, and McTeague was wondering (since there are but two in a set) how many incisor teeth went into that necklace, when Tukmoo reached the deck, and planting his prehensile-toed feet firmly, demanded in

fairly fluent pidgin-English, strong drink.

McTeague obliged with watered brandy further weakened by grenadine sirup with a chaser of coffee. He had blundered into a lagoon usurped by Tukmoo when he was driven from his heritage by Po Sung. He regretted the cruise and again wished himself far away.

"O Chief, I must make repairs to my boat," he stated. "How come you no longer guard the pearl lagoon to the south?"

Tukmoo spoke wily words of wisdom. He had the advantage of acquaintance during youth and young manhood with a zealous missionary and at the good man's death from old age had absorbed (according to his belief) wisdom of his heart, which Tukmoo ate roasted. He related a cause for deserting his pearl lagoon which was difficult to translate into pidgin. Captain McTeague shortened the tale for his Swede mate, Okey, when he announced that he would go ashore with Tukmoo.

"Okey, Po Sung has got the pearl lagoon. He's loosed a few extra fine devils and scared the giblets out of Tukmoo. I don't understand the details, but Po Sung has a flock of red devils on the river. They sound like man-eaters, whether bird or beast I can't make out. The muggers speak words. The apes chin-chin in native lingo. The land is bewitched. I suspected a phonograph, but Tukmoo has one he got from Quong Yick and knows better. His son sailed in to lick hell out of Po Sung and turned up missing just when he was ready to marry a girl all nicely ripened in the bleaching-huts. Tukmoo is ready to make bigger magic by torturing this girl, only we happened along in time to fall into the mess, and I wish to God that typhoon had piled us on the Curlews before we ran in here. Tukmoo demands that I go and make magic that will drive out Po Sung, since his own monkey-tricks have failed. There's no choice about it, Okey. I've got to go or they'll make potpourri and Irish stew of you and me and the crew. Get me my box of parlor tricks and Bengal lights and pack in a dozen sticks of dynamite with fuses and caps. If you hear me fire two shots twice in succession be ready to grab me and run for deep water. If I don't come back the schooner is yours, Okey."

"You ban damn fool to go," commented Okey. But already Captain McTeague felt the thrill of high adventure beating his blood to foam as the drums in canoes spoke to drums on shore of events going forward.

THE stilt-legged huts of a comparatively new village were fresh-thatched and clean. Women stirred cooking-pots over beach fires. Beside Captain McTeague swaggered a black boy, Tao, carrying the box of parlor magic over which he was appointed guard. It was the first time Captain McTeague had been in league with black men or broken his wisdom of neutrality in thirty years of trading. He assumed an arrogance he did not feel as he sat at the feast of roast sea-turtle, scraped coconut cream and stewed fish washed down with fermented palm-juice. Strolling about the village afterward he saw the bereaved mother of Tukmoo's lost son Tawa, her body painted in white stripes, her hair matted with filth in token of mourning grief. He also saw old women guarding the bleaching-hut, and caught a glimpse of the bride, who stuck out her head and gazed for a long minute at this white man who came to fight Po Sung's debbil-debbils and avenge her lost lover.

She was pretty as a doll, with hair like a curly feather duster, and skin bleached to creamy copper. To McTeague she called a greeting, "Halloo, *Tuan!*"

Tukmoo's rage was sudden. He yelped a command and the girl's shrieks shrilled through the village with the sound of a whip.

"Are you having that child beaten?" he demanded of Tukmoo.

"Not enough to injure her comeliness, because if she is not killed for a debbil feast, I will sell her to a big-bellied Chinese trader," explained Tukmoo.

McTeague knew the folly of interference, yet he hated the sound of the whipping, and played a bold game for a man in the power of savages whose aspect could change from friendliness to yelps of blood-lust in the twinkling of an eye.

"You are wrong to punish the woman just now," he said. "She will prove a help to our magic if she is told she will be taken with us so that her liver, hot with love for your son Tawa, will smell out the place where he is kept prisoner."

Tukmoo was impressed by this reasoning and yelped a rescinding command. The shrieks of the girl changed to quiet sobbing. The whip-wielder leaped from the hut and the girl was flung, sobbing hysterically, to the doorway, where she looked down on McTeague with tear-streaked face and eyes like brimming golden pools. He wondered if her evident adoration of him as her deliverer might be turned to account in getting himself out of a perilous predicament.

TUKMOO commanded a day of feasting. By night the *lagi-lagi* house held sodden harvest of drunken and overstuffed warriors, and Tukmoo slept with his head on the stomach of his oldest wife. McTeague, who dined and drank sparingly, prowled through the deserted village and halted beside the bleaching-hut, where a rift of moonlight splintered by palm sabers twinkled on the face of the girl at the door. Near by drowsed the young Tao with McTeague's box between his legs.

In a long day of scheming and planning escape by the river McTeague saw his first chance of success. Laying a finger on his lips for silence, he beckoned the girl down the notched log from the hut and touched the sleepy Tao, who started, snatched up the box and stood ready to accompany the white sorcerer.

McTeague pointed to the river and a canoe hauled on shore. It was slipped soundlessly to the water and the three took their places with the girl in the prow.

McTeague understood the awe of his magic box which made them obey unquestioningly. Tukmoo ruled by fear of his cruelties, and the white sorcerer was greater than Tukmoo. In the face of that appraisal of his powers, McTeague did not dare command Tao to head for the lagoon and schooner. He was compelled to make some sort of farce of laying Po Sung's devils, for a cry from Tao would arouse the village and turn the moon-silvered peace to red slaughter. He saw regretfully that Tao headed the canoe inland on the black waterway.

They had not gone a half-mile when in the din of droning, humming, clacking insects came a sound which made the girl gasp with fear and held Tao's paddle dripping as he paused to listen. It was like a voice speaking through a muffled, rasping megaphone. McTeague's skin was prickling as he distinguished words, disconnected and

maudlin, as if a drunken sailor mouthed a booming sea-chanty.

"Blo-ow . . . ma-an do-o-own, o-oh blo-ow tha ma-an do-own." It was repeated and followed by obscene curses.

"Walk-about land, *Tuan!*" whispered the girl who crouched at McTeague's feet.

"A white man in the jungle," he stated with conviction.

"Debbil-debbil!" came a low mutter from Tao.

McTeague watched the river for a canoe. Moon-silver, frail as a spider's spinning, crinkled on the black flow which upheaved. The long head of a crocodile lifted and it seemed to McTeague that from its wicked jaws came a water-smothered repetition of "Blo-ow the man do-own." Then it sank and bubbles broke. The canoe shot forward under frenzied paddling, and in its wake the mugger again lifted his snout and gaping jaws.

"Da-amn Po Su-ung," came a hollow growl answered by a cackle of raucous laughter from the jungle which made McTeague snatch the revolver at his hip.

"Orang-outang," he said as a tree branch released from the clutch of the mighty "gray man of the woods" crashed. Again came that outcry of terrible mirth and he saw the gray shape, a lighter shadow in the gloom where the moonlight quivered through shaken palms.

"The joke is on you, Red Moorphy," came a deep-chested growl. "Ye hated wather. It took Po Sung to make ye loike ut. Why don't ye find pearls yerself? Pearls! Hell, they got us in this mess. Made a mugger o' you an' a monkey o' me."

Red Murphy! McTeague knew that name. It belonged to a drunken loafer and thief who had served time for killing a Chink trader in pearls. But he could not credit his senses as he heard a jungle voice attribute the personality of a river mugger to Red Murphy.

The canoe leaped like an arrow down the stream, but the gray man of the woods kept pace and the crocodile followed. A patch of shelving shore denuded of vegetation gave off a sickening stench. McTeague was thankful the walk-about ground was temporarily deserted of saurians. At his feet the girl quivered and her teeth chattered. His hair rose in contagion of fear as the moonlight entered a less dense patch of jungle vines where the big ape swung by one foot peering at the river. Again arose that soul-shattering human laughter ringing through the night.

"Wan more white fool," came the guttural cry. "Go on, you bloody idiot! Po Sung'll take yer brain an' sell yer dried head, an' feed yer carcass to his orchids, like he did to Red Moorphy an' me. God . . . God . . . like he did to us fer wantin' a few pearls . . ."

A scream from the girl contracted McTeague's nerve skeins. From behind the leathery throat of the saurian moaned a booming "Meat—whi-ite me-at. Ea-at. Dr-rink an' be-ee merry."

"Lave 'em alo-one," growled the ape. "I'll have company when Po Sung gits 'em. Don't fill yer leather belly wid white ma-an. Here, have a nut." There was a thud as the hairy gray arm swung and a coconut hit the mugger's jaws, which snapped shut. Then it lunged on shore, the crooked-fanged jaws snapping in vain at the ape which swung just out of reach and shrilled curses as it pelted the armor-clad mugger with coconuts.

McTeague stared. He pinched his own flesh to make sure he was awake.

Glancing at Tao he saw sweat pouring down the oiled black chest of the native and the gleam of his eye-whites as he strained every muscle to outdistance the river horror.

Through the overhung river channel resounded the crash of water beaten by the powerful tail of the crocodile, its booming curses of port dive origin, the thuds of coconuts on its scaly length, the horrid shrieks of the ape's mirth as it denuded palms of their nuts. The river bobbed with them. The roar and scream of the combat was like thunder, silencing the rasp of insect chatter and hard breathing of Tao. McTeague thought he should soon awake from this incredible nightmare. He assured himself it was the ravings of delirium, but the fingernails of the girl cut his flesh as she clutched his legs in her terror.

"Catchum white-man chin-chin," she quivered. "Make magic, *Tuan*."

The river turned. The walls of matted lianas shut the sound of combat farther away; then only did Tao slacken speed.

"Debbil-debbils," he groaned. McTeague thought of the feeble frauds of parlor magic in the box shoved toward him by the girl, simple tricks he had brought to fight such magic as he never dreamed — dread, incomprehensible black magic. Had Po Sung trained an ape to speak, a crocodile to talk? He could think of no other explanation, yet that mockery was dissipated when he recalled the words of the ape and its reasoning. This was no parrotlike repetition of words, nor would Po Sung be likely to teach jungle beasts English curses. The terrible Mongolian had invented a new hell into which McTeague plunged, and in that hour his only resolve was to sell life dearly but to die rather than fall into the power of that arch-fiend.

The swish of branches near by roused him. In the waning moonlight of the hour before dawn, he saw a second gray shape swinging along and slowly whimpering inarticulate sounds resembling native lingo. The girl stiffened as she knelt, her hands clutched her round breasts and her cry aroused McTeague's pity.

"Tawa," she moaned, "Tawa chin-chin . . . talk-talkee."

McTeague felt his chair prickling his scalp. The canoe drifted as Tao was frozen with fear. There was the drip-drip of the paddle held in air.

"Tawa, Tawa," called the girl. The ape ceased muttering, then clutched a mat of lianas and swung closer, peering down at the face of the girl now gray-yellow in the frame of bushy curls. There came a scream that curdled McTeague's blood. The hairy arm shot out and caught the girl's hair, and she was lifted from the canoe to twist slowly and struggle feebly until McTeague's gun cracked. Came a howl of pain as the hold was released, the girl slumped in the canoe and the ape streaked into the jungle. The canoe leaped forward.

McTeague let the girl lie in merciful oblivion. His own blood congealed at the horror of this demon-haunted domain of Po Sung. Behind them came the fighting mugger and first ape, and they dared not attempt to turn back.

GRAY dawn sifted over moon and stars. Through densely matted lianas McTeague saw patches of pearl-tinted sky and caught lurid gleams of scarlet flowers which breathed a fetid scent as repulsive as the walk-about grounds of crocodiles. The shore was a mass of orchids, with black throats and quivering stamens of yellow, which climbed the branches of gray trees and

dead ropes of vines. A bend in the river hid them from the ape and mugger. The canoe navigated a stretch of stream walled by the furious scarlet of orchids that seemed to announce the master-hand of a gardener planting them like ruddy cliffs along the black flow of river shadow.

When the sun spread gold on the upper reaches of the flower wall, McTeague observed the orchid petals quivering and folding in elongated bulb-shapes of dull yellow. The river widened into a pool, smooth as a mirror bordered with fern and feathery nipa palm. There was lurid and ominous beauty in the place, a menacing and maddening tumult of scarlet orchids of gigantic size, with petals five feet or more in length, their dusky black throats shading to maroon purple. The stamens stood out like knobbed wands thick as a man's thumb. The stench was breath-taking, overpowering, disgusting, yet when he commanded Tao to land he met vigorous protest.

"Catchum die," chattered Tao. He dropped the paddle to scoop water in his palms and suck at it noisily. McTeague snatched the paddle and sent the canoe shoreward. Its prow shoved aside the ferns and he thrust a foot to test the pool rim for a landing foothold, balancing his body with arms outthrust. Instantly the nearest giant flowers lunged forward and he was shocked to helplessness as the great petals wrapped about his bare arm with the cold sensation of serpent scales, yet repulsively flexible and soft.

Paralyzed from amazement he felt himself pulled from the canoe to flounder breast-high in the pool, the petal grip on his arm tenaciously supporting his weight. His arm pained as if constricted by a tourniquet. Tao's screech roused the girl, who first recovered her wits and snatched a knife from Tao's belt. McTeague was trying in vain to tear off the orchid petal. His senses reeled from the anesthetic stench of the orchid throat and he was only vaguely aware that the girl slashed loose gray sections of petals, the veins of which took strength to sever. He slumped into the pool, over his head, and came up, to clutch at the canoe stern over which he was hauled.

Tearing the petal fragments from his arm he felt the stab of pain, and blood spurted from the pores of a swelling red band. McTeague was horrified with fear of virulent poison. He jabbed his knife into the flesh and sucked vigorously, spitting into the pool as Tao sent the craft from shore.

As the canoe drifted near shore, McTeague saw the orchids move forward on their stems like gorgeous beast-heads craning toward a glut of meat. The whole wall was alert and in motion, lunging out, waving giant flowers to and fro until he could see the supporting jungle trees dead and bleached to the tops. He knew the vampire orchids of the jungle, but never before had he seen such huge ones, or animal greed so voraciously displayed. Adding to horror, the pool narrowed again to river width, arched overhead by the terrible scarlet flowers. It was like the red throat of a medieval dragon yawning for victims.

McTeague turned from the sight and observed a singular phenomenon at the pool. As the sun rose and its hot light gilded the topmost flowers, their petals jerked reluctantly shut, folded into bulb-shaped buds. At his command the paddle halted. They waited until sunlight flooded the pool and the shore was hung with leathery yellow bulbs. The shaded river yielded

more slowly to the all-powerful sun. The canoe went on, and as if sentient, aware of meat near by, the tips of petals unfolded like tigers' tongues. There was the sound of creaking and rubber stems writhing like serpents. The sun had worked one of its myriad miracles, but it did not penetrate into the scarlet funnel more than a hundred yards, where McTeague faced low-hanging scarlet horrors that swayed forward, greedy for prey.

Again the craft was halted and McTeague reached for his box, then busied himself biting caps and fuses on sticks of dynamite. His right arm was swollen to twice its natural size and almost useless.

His lips were hot and dry as in fever. The flower stench was terrific and making them all drowsy.

Yelling to Tao to back the canoe he tossed a stick of dynamite at each river shore, and they were drifting on the pool when a deafening roar crashed. There were tearing and slithering sounds. The river roof seemed to lift and a backwash of water rocked their craft.

For some moments debris rained down, brilliant bunches of feathers that had been Paradise birds and lories, ragged tatters of orchid petals, nooses of lianas; then the scarlet wall seemed to subside and float on the water surface, a bridge of vegetation over which McTeague assisted Tao to shove the canoe into sun-drenched water beyond.

To his incredible relief, McTeague breathed cleaner air than the stinking fetidity of the orchid pool. There was clean salt breeze from the sea and tang of ebb-tide which cleared his brain of the poison that stultified his senses. But they faced peril ahead, for as the river turned he saw the tip-tilted cornices of a dwelling built like an old temple of Cathay and knew they approached the house of Po Sung.

Much as he dreaded a meeting with that terrific personage, there was no choice. He hoped his wits and obvious blundering into the place would prove his innocence of intent to thieve pearls. He was too well known to drop out of sight without inquiry and trouble for any man who held him prisoner. And in all, even Po Sung was a more endurable alternative than a return by the river. Yet his nerves tautened as he saw cultivated gardens, and a long pergola-like bridge spanning the river, completely covered at the far end with the scarlet orchids folded now in yellow buds.

Small channels had been cut from the river, and one of these they followed to a small pool. Red lacquer bridges arched the little streams. The sea-tang was stronger. There were hedges of fragrant ylang-ylang and frangipani, glimpses of orchards and growing plants in trim array, white crushed-coral paths, coolies in wide hats moving about, stone steps of a landing-place which caught McTeague's breath and gaze.

A TALL form in a robe of saffron yellow awaited them, its hands folded in green-banded sleeves. Captain McTeague looked into the grim black eyes of Po Sung.

"Welcome." He spoke in suspiciously bland tones. "I do not often have visitors, Captain McTeague."

His eyes darted like black quicksilver from McTeague's head down his bleeding arm to his river-wet trousers and boots.

"I heard your salute. My servants came running to report a breach in my orchid wall. I did not expect you to dynamite a way to my poor house, Cap-

tain McTeague. Why not have come by the sea?"

"No doubt you know the reason, Po Sung. Your boat took a pot-shot at my schooner yesterday. I had no idea of visiting you, but when I put in to make repairs, Tukmoo decided to detain me. I've had a bad night trying to get away and got a caress from your loving orchids. Could I trouble you for some permanganate?"

"My poor house is at your disposal, Captain McTeague."

He followed Po Sung up the path, with the girl close at his heels. Tao was sent to white-washed huts of coolie workers. On the porch of the house, copper-screened and shaded, McTeague fell into a sea-grass chair and snatched at the tall glass of cool liquid brought by a Dyak servant. He was exhausted and his eyes closed.

When he wakened he was lying on a soft mattress, clad in silk pajamas, and his wounded arm was wrapped with gauze. Light from a horn-sided ceiling lantern showed him a sleeping-room with no other furnishings than his bed and a blue jar of scentless hibiscus along one wall. He was troubled by far-away moanings and yowls from the jungle, as if the great gray men of the woods howled their hate of Po Sung.

Then again he slept and awoke greatly refreshed. The Dyak boy brought a tray of food, highly spiced chicken curry, fruit and rice wine. Evidently Po Sung lived in luxury in his hidden haven. McTeague decided that the tales told of the Mongolian were too luridly flavored by superstition. A devil he might be, but he had extended gentlemanly hospitality to Captain McTeague.

The Dyak boy shaved McTeague, trimmed his bronze beard. He was shown a coral-lined swimming-pool, where he bathed and donned pajamas of heavier silk and thick-soled sandals, returning to the porch where Po Sung sat waving a womanish fan of carved ivory and kingfisher feathers.

"You slept well, Captain McTeague?" he inquired.

"Splendidly, thanks to you, Po Sung."

"I am honored. I feared your rest would be disturbed. The big apes were noisy and my servants worked with torches in the garden. However I am free today to entertain you. No doubt you came for pearls."

He clapped his hands, and the Dyak boy appeared with a lacquer box and placed it on McTeague's lap, then opened the lid. McTeague gazed on such magnificence of pearls as he had never seen, ran his fingers in their glory, poured them from palm to palm, then realizing that his eyes too much reflected the greed he felt of such wealth he resolutely snapped down the lid and motioned the boy to take them away.

"The sight of them makes me want them, of course, but I only *trade* in pearls, and so far only through Quong Yick, who told me that Tukmoo no longer held this lagoon. I came to learn why he let it go, and I fell into his clutches. He took me prisoner and demanded powerful magic to fight your debbil-debbils. I brought my parlor tricks and dynamite. What else could I do? Tukmoo had me where he could force me to do his bidding. Then he had a big feast, and while he was drunk and asleep I came away with Tao the black boy and the girl who was to have been the wife of Twa, son of Tukmoo. We were pretty badly scared at the apes and muggers on the way here and drifted into the orchid lagoon. I blasted my way through."

Po Sung caressed the silky black mustache which dripped like tar-streams from his upper lip.

"Tukmoo's son is braver than the sorcerer. I admire such courage in youth and have made him independent of the blacks, who are stupid pigs. But it is a pity to separate two lovers, so I was pleased when you brought the girl. They shall be united."

"That's mighty decent of you, Po Sung," said McTeague impulsively. Then, as he saw the basilisk gaze of those black eyes and the sneering smile of the cruel lips, his heart missed a beat.

"You mean what you have just said?" he faltered.

"I speak the truth, Captain McTeague. In a few days you shall see for yourself. Meanwhile I should like to show you some of the magic I have worked here, and the growth of an orchid bulb planted only last night. Come!"

McTeague followed him toward the pergola arching the river. It was still in shadow and the scarlet orchids wide open at the jungle end. At the near approach, thick green stems thrust rosy tips from soft, loose earth. Po Sung's yellow hand pointed, and McTeague saw the stems stretch higher, growing inches as he watched, putting forth buds, and twisting through the bars of the trellis.

"Marvelous, Po Sung. You are another Burbank."

"Again I am honored by your praise. The wild orchid devoured only insects and birds, but under my gardening it is perfected to a man-eating flower fed by blood. It is a hungry thing, Captain McTeague, and only for the foolish assaults of Tukmoo's warriors, the river walls would not have flourished as they do. I planted those bulbs in human carcasses, as this one was planted last night."

McTeague's body jerked. His head came up slowly until he gazed into the terrible eyes of Po Sung.

"You planted a bulb in a human body last night?"

Po Sung nodded.

"Did I not say that I have decided to unite Tawa and his bride? Tawa is now in the jungle. I heard him chattering to you as you came up the river. I hope your shot did not maim him. Tawa's body feeds this full-grown orchid across the bridge. His brain is in the head of a gray man of the woods."

"God in Heaven!" breathed McTeague. "You mock me with lies."

Po Sung smiled. His black eyebrows arched.

"You shall see and believe. You are not the first man to doubt the power of Po Sung. One year ago two thieves stole in from the sea. One of them supplied brains to a river crocodile, the other is a gray ape. They were companions in crime, but always fighting. They still fight along the river shore, a most amusing sight, as you must have found it last night."

McTeague felt the tropic heat choking him, yet cold sweat rained down his face. He stumbled over the coral paths as he followed Po Sung to the house and through doorways he scarcely saw, with the smell of chloroform growing stronger, until he stood in a room with white cement walls, a skylight overhead, fitted like a hospital operating-room. Under the open skylight was a huge iron-legged cot, to which the body of a she-ape was strapped, its head swathed in bandages. Two Chinese were clearing away the evidences of surgery, and one of them spoke to Po Sung in accentless English:

"She is doing splendidly."

"The bride of Tawa," announced Po Sung, pointing to the ape. "My assistant, Dr. Feng Chu."

McTeague heard no more. The floor seemed to heave and bludgeon him. He had fainted.

FOR time of which he had no means of keeping track, McTeague lay on a porch couch, waited on hand and foot by the Dyak boy. Po Sung and Dr. Feng Chu, he learned from the assistant surgeon, were away in the yacht. Po Sung left orders to show Captain McTeague every respect and tell him the casket of pearls was a gift. It was advisable not to attempt to return to his schooner until Po Sung's arrival. The gray apes were troublesome lately.

They troubled McTeague. At night he heard the raucous mirth and mournful calling of Tawa, and saw the ghoulish man-shapes in the starlight. The she-ape in the surgery was also noisy, moaning piteously, and mouthing queer sounds quite different from ape-chatter.

It seemed to McTeague he was still in feverish delirium. He did not want to escape, had no power to attempt it. There were books, but he would not exert himself to read. Wandering about the grounds, he noticed the new orchid had attained a prodigious size and was already beginning to bloom. Mingled with his waking dreams were thoughts of two vampire orchids rooted in the moldering flesh of Tawa and the girl, and their brains in the heads of jungle simians.

There came a day when the assistant surgeon led the she-ape to the grounds and chained her to a tree, where she squatted as inert as McTeague on the porch. He wondered at her limpness until the Chinese told him she was under opiates to keep her quiet while her head healed. Then it flashed to the mind of McTeague that, like the ape, he was being doped. No other explanation accounted for his spineless indifference to his fate. A healthy fear intruded on his half-dreams. He was being held for some sinister purpose of Po Sung.

"Where is Po Sung?" he asked the Chinese.

"You have heard of a remarkable trained ape belonging to a scientist in Java, perhaps? Po Sung hopes to bring it back and turn it into this jungle as a companion for Tawa and the other experiment on the pearl thief, McMahon."

"I have seen pet monkeys freed among their own kind," said McTeague slowly. "The wild monkeys kill them instantly."

The Chinese did not answer, for the she-ape had roused and was leaping to the length of her chains. The tree shook with her vigorous attempts to free herself.

"Now she shall have her lesson to avoid the house when she is at liberty," said the Chinese. He went into the house and appeared again with a whip of long thin lashes barbed with metal. Watching his chance, he swung it at the she-ape.

McTeague hated the cruelty of that performance, the furious suffering beast with her blood-red eyes, the streaks of blood spurting from her flanks and the cold-blooded Chinese lashing with all his strength. His own blood boiled, raced, lashed him to fury that combated the dope he was now certain had been fed him in the spicy curries at mealtimes.

When the ape sank down quivering and exhausted, the coolies rushed forward and unshackled her, and again the lash sang through the air and lifted tufts of skin. With a bound she was

up and staggering uncertainly away, to disappear over the bridge into the jungle. The Chinese coiled his whip and returned to the house.

That day McTeague scraped his food into a towel and hid it under his mattress, then wandered to the gardens and ate fruit. Already he felt lighter, freer, but his nerves ached for the sedative. He realized a new peril, a craving for opium fed him, that would be worse than slavery unless he escaped at once. But he did not know how closely his movements were guarded.

He returned to the porch. The assistant surgeon was talking to a coolie, whom he dismissed. He asked McTeague to come with him to the surgery, where he filled a hypodermic needle, then laid yellow fingers on the white man's arm.

"No you don't," exploded McTeague. "You've doped me long enough. Po Sung won't use my carcass for his devil-orchids unless he kills my brain first." His fist shot out, caught the point of the yellow jaw, and with a screech the Chinese doubled up on the floor. McTeague heard running feet and slammed shut the metal door of the surgery just as yellow men lunged into view. The bolt rang home. He had barricaded himself in the cement-walled room with the unconscious yellow man.

FOR a few moments he felt huge satisfaction, but it passed as the Chinese stirred. He hauled him to the cot and strapped him with bonds that had held the she-ape. Then he mopped his sweaty face and considered. From the open skylight he heard sounds of some alarm. The yellow men had thundered on the door, then departed. Using a small ladder, he climbed to the roof opening and looked from the tiers of roofs down on the domain of Po Sung, the sunset colors on the gleaming lagoon and sea, and he saw there the rakish black yacht whose guns had fired on his schooner. Po Sung had returned.

News of his return agitated the servants, who darted to and fro with flaring torches. Then McTeague saw the cause of their excitement. On the orchid-twined bridge two gray shapes swung, and the closed flower bulbs bobbed like elongated balloons on strings. The river water was stirred by a lashing black tail, and in the rapidly gathering night gloom sounded the booming curses of devils which Po Sung had created, roused now to fury against the arch-fiend.

A fierce, unholy joy filled the breast of Captain McTeague. Below him the yellow surgeon heaved against the binding thongs of the cot. A dancing light low down the lagoon told of Po Sung's small boat leaving the yacht. He would enter the waterway and meet the rage of his victims, and from his high perch McTeague could defy them all, Po Sung, the mugger and the apes.

No, not all, for a third wavering gray ape came over the bridge, fangs bared in a horrid grin, frightening the torch-bearers back to the house as she advanced. In the smoky light McTeague could see the raw-edged scar about her head which bandages had hidden that day. Her screams were piercing and pitiful, her scrambling weak and uncertain, but she was fearless, for behind her stalked the man-apes, tremendously powerful, long arms swinging to their feet, and before that terrible sight the coolies retreated with wild screeches, slamming doors, moving furniture against all openings.

Up the river bank crawled a glistening black length of scaled ugliness, with jaws snapping.

McTeague heard the sound of rip-

ping and tearing, the furious scream of the simians, then blood-curdling cries. He saw a glare below, where the she-ape tossed torches in a heap to blaze and burn, lighting the scene of carnage. He saw human forms, broken and twisted, hurled from the porch, and strips of bamboo walls tossed on the fire. Then he knew his own peril. Sooner or later the apes would slaughter every living thing, tear the house to shreds and break into this surgery. He looked down at the bound yellow man on the cot. There was no time for petty differences.

"The jungle apes are killing the servants," he cried, "and burning the house. We are trapped up here, and Po Sung is on his way by the river to meet a doom he deserves. I'll confess I'm a coward right at this minute. I prefer a shot to that death. Is there a gun within reach?"

He dropped down and unfastened the bonds, then pointed to a ladder, which the Chinese mounted, even climbing out on the roof to look over its edge.

McTeague heard him cry out, a despairing shriek of terror. He leaped up the ladder in time to see a gray shape squatted on the roof dangling the miserable surgeon by one arm and swinging him back and forth. Suddenly her hold broke. The Chinese twisted in the air and fell to the ground, quivered, and then lay still.

McTeague looked into the gleaming red eyes of the she-ape. He had no weapon, but below were cases of surgical knives, his only defense now, his only chance of suicide to escape worse. He dropped from the skylight and his fist crashed into the glass of a case, his fingers fumbled in the darkness among queer contrivances, but none of them knives. He dashed to another case, guided by the faint luminosity of glass, and crashed through it. Then faint starlight and fire reflection were blotted out. The skylight held the she-ape, and she had dropped inside and sat on the ladder peering at him. He could see her gleaming eyes, hear his own breath sobbing in his throat as his hands fumbled for knives and found only small probes, useless to fight that huge gray death.

He was flattened against the wall beside the case, a fistful of sharp probes ready for the lunge, when he heard her muttering in piteous efforts to control the vocal mechanism of the thick throat.

"Tuan," she muttered, *"Tuan;"* and swung down from the ladder with an arm outstretched. He felt the claws touch his arm gently, and stroke his flesh.

* * *

THEN for McTeague blackness fell. He was vaguely aware of being swung in giant arms and feeling a cool wind in his face. His eyes opened. He lay on the upper roof, with the arm of the she-ape holding him firmly. Below, the fire leaped and the sounds of savage destruction went on, but there were no cries of fear now, only the guttural curses of the ape McMahon and war-cries of Papuan jungle uttered by Tawa. Turning his head, McTeague saw the light on the yacht's dinghy coming down the river.

"Look," he muttered, and his arm pointed. The she-ape turned.

She saw and understood. In another moment McTeague was seized bodily and swung in air as the she-ape swiftly descended by the tiers of pointed roofs until he was dropped unhurt on the earth. Seizing him by one wrist she ran with him toward the river, where black gloom of trees hid them effectively. There McTeague, still held by

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his captor, saw the dark swirl of water where the mugger dived. He saw the boat sweep on under the dip of oars, to its doom.

There was an upheaved bow lantern, cries in the night, and the lashing of the mugger's tail, the snapping of its terrible jaws and sea-oaths from its dread throat.

Later, a limp, dripping figure crawled to the bank. McTeague could hear its gasping breathing, and the she-ape leaped forward. He was free.

He waited until the she-ape seized that creeping victim escaped from the mugger, and her cry summoned the man-apes, one of whom carried a brand of flaming wood. Its light shone on the yellow face of Po Sung, distorted now by terror he had so often chiseled on faces of other men. McTeague saw the she-ape clutch the long ends of his mustache, curl them about her claws and drag Po Sung by his mouth toward the pergola.

Then he turned away at the dreadful cry that broke. The three apes were tearing Po Sung to bits and stuffing them into the orchid bulbs.

On the river the dinghy floated. McTeague darted toward it, plunged in, dragged it to the shallows and secured a floating oar. He glanced back at the river bend and saw the apes flinging bits to the gaping jaws of the mugger. Then he sculled for life toward the lagoon.

A cry from Po Sung's yacht hailed him, but he paid no heed. One man could not catch McTeague on that night of fear, and the others of the crew were staining the black river water with their life-blood. A gleaming stretch of lagoon entrance beckoned to the sea, which was quiet, star-silvered. It was the time of ebb-tide, an evil hour in Papua, but Captain McTeague was be-

yond feeling, beyond thinking, horror-drugged, fear-driven, possessing the strength of a maniac as he sculled the boat north.

HE DID not remember coming to the lagoon where his schooner lay, but the mate told him later that they saw him standing in the boat, swaying from side to side like a drunken man, and through the glass they recognized Captain McTeague.

There was a tremendous feast the day after his return. Tukmoo and his warriors wakened the jungle echoes by their drums. Captain McTeague lay oblivious, and Okey the mate did the honors of the occasion, standing guard over the deck cot where McTeague lay prone, exhausted, weary to death and fighting nightmares.

"You ban wan great man, Captain," Okey explained later. "Tukmoo ban brang pearls off Po Sung. Debbil-debbils ban gone now. How come?"

Tukmoo had raked over the wreckage of Po Sung's house and found the casket of fine pearls. It seemed a trifling reward for laying the debbil-debbils of Po Sung, but Captain McTeague only shuddered and closed his eyes.

"Haul up the mud-hooks and crowd on canvas," he said to Okey. "When Red Murphy and McMahon and Tawa and the she-ape get a grouch on, there'll be hell popping in that jungle. I've seen it for the last time. Not for a ship's hold of pearls will I put in at any lagoon on the Banda shore. They nearly made a monkey of me, Okey, honored me by fetching a trained orang-outang from Java to hold my witless brains. Maybe they had my measure at that. I was fool enough to go in and idiot enough to escape. A wise man would never have come out alive."

NEXT MONTH

THE RED SWIMMER

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THE EYRIE

CAROLINE FERBER writes from Chicago: "Gee, it's a relief to have a subscription to WT and see it in the mail box each month—so much better than chasing from newsstand to shop looking for 'em. The Finlay cover on the January issue was a treat. *Waxworks* certainly had the Bloch eery skeerdness, yet thru the whole, I felt an undercurrent of suspicion that the witch-like vampiric statue was actually the dead woman. That feller up Milwaukee-way is certainly not a Blochhead. Finlay's illustration of *L'Allegro* conveys a feeling of slimy, slithery horrors—certainly a success in my opinion—this lad. Medusa gets in again—this time in Missouri. My, my, how she does travel—the shudderiest Medusa yarn I've read in some time. Now this Cyril Mand (newcomer) offered us a good 'un with *The Fifth Candle*. Quite enjoyable reading for this insatiable weird appetite. *Bride of the Lightning* brot to mind the former weird tale, *Child of the Winds*. What fun it must be to stand among the darting flashes and be uninjured! Not bad, Mr. Hamilton. Kelley's Cleopatra grows more tense each time—I gnaw my nails while awaiting the final instalment. Imagine being imprisoned in a lightless dungeon with a flappy, slithery something slapping its way toward you. I can't. Johnson's *The Silver Coffin* is a nice little vampire yarn, but I don't care for the narrative rambling of the old watchman. Our friend, Gans T. Field, entertained us nicely with *These Doth the Lord Hate*. Too bad; really the precious 'little cabbage' was so well on the way to becoming a witch, and how utterly final was the tale! Ah!—the forest of Averoigne and C. A. Smith. It's some time since I read of the place, but it felt like visiting an old friend. I hadn't read *A Rendezvous in Averoigne* before, so it was doubly enjoyed. *Medusa's Coil* seems most outstanding to me —one that I will remember the longest. Two things I am happy to note: the announcement that WT will be increased to 160 pages—and the Eyrie is back to normal size. Looking thru the Eyrie, it seems we readers are all of one opinion: don't change illustrators and don't change WT . . . I wanna 'nother Rald story—s'more Thorp McClusky vampires and more of these treats—Jirel of Joiry —also another old-timer long missing—Northwest Smith. Any chance?" [You shall have all these, and soon.—THE EDITOR.]

Good Start for 1939

John V. Baltadonis writes from Philadelphia: "You've started off the new year in the right way—with a Finlay cover, of course! I hope to see many more of Virgil's art work embellishing the covers of WEIRD TALES this forthcoming year. Still speaking (raving is more proper, I should say) of Finlay, I wish to comment here that his interpretation of Milton's *L'Allegro* is great! Bloch, Hamilton and Mand are similarly honored. The best stories for this issue are *Waxworks, Medusa's Coil, Bride of the Lightning, A Rendezvous in Averoigne,* and *I Found Cleopatra*. I still think Kelley's serial is darned good, but I think Smith's

reprint and Z. B. Bishop's contribution are slightly better. Of the others, Hamilton and Bloch come to the fore. I liked *The Fifth Candle* by Cyril Mand. *And Thus I Knew* by Dorothy Agard Ansley somehow won my fancy, probably its odd brevity."

A Fine Shilling's Worth

D. F. Cooke writes from South Norwood, England: "The December issue of WEIRD TALES is on the whole the best I think I have ever read. Robert Bloch's story, *Waxworks*, was easily the best. I cannot remember a dull story yet by this author and I think I have read them all. He is in my estimation your best at present. *Medusa's Coil* was very good and an easy second. Hamilton is also a favorite of mine with those weird-scientific stories, and his *Bride of the Lightning* was very good, but did he expand upon it sufficiently? *The Fifth Candle* was quite good among its class, but I especially enjoyed the reprint of Smith's story, *A Rendezvous in Averoigne*. It was the short stories, though, which were outstanding, and I think that *The Silver Coffin* deserves special praise as a classic among vampire *short* stories. Virgil Finlay's drawings were superb and his illustration for *Waxworks* deserved the place on the cover. His illustration for *L'Allegro* is one of the most gruesome pictures I have yet seen. Thank you, WEIRD TALES, for a fine shilling's worth."

Kelley's Two Serials

Ad Meyer writes from Chicago: "I want to express my gratitude to you for printing a story which I personally consider as one of the best I have read for a long time. I am not a regular reader of your magazine, and this letter could be said to be directly inspired by my good fortune in picking up second-hand a copy of your magazine printed a year or so ago. By great good fortune (as it happened) I got the third instalment of a serial titled *The Last Pharaoh*, written by Thomas P. Kelley. Eventually, with good luck, I managed to secure the other instalments. I then read the complete story, and

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very frankly I was amazed to find such a very high standard of fiction in your magazine. Mr. Kelley, I found, was only one of the many fine writers whose work was to be found in the pages of WEIRD TALES. . . . *The Last Pharaoh* was the best thing I have read in *any* magazine and the only unfortunate thing is that Mr. Thomas P. Kelley is not a more frequent contributor. I would not go so far as to say that *I Found Cleopatra* is a better yarn than his former one, but so far, including instalment two in December, I find it the most entertaining piece of fiction of the year, save, maybe, A. Merritt's *The Ship of Ishtar* in Argosy. But as this is a reprint of that old masterpiece, I won't class it along with Kelley's story, in all fairness to the author. You have secured a first-class drawing-card for your magazine. But, quite probably, this man is really some well-known writer using a nom-de-plume for WEIRD and doing other stories for other magazines under his real name. At least that is my conclusion. Will you tell us who he really is? I would like to know." [No; Thomas P. Kelley is not a pseudonym. He lives in Canada, and has been writing fiction only recently. Kelley is his real name.—THE EDITOR.]

Jirel of Joiry

Frank Bryan, Jr., writes from Mattoon, Illinois: "I am glad to read in the January Eyrie that the number of pages is going to be increased. If you put it out twice a month it would not be too often. I hope that you follow the same practice in selecting reprints; you should print other weird stories though, which have not appeared in old WEIRD TALES. And please, reprint Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard's old stories. Speaking of the future, what happened to Jirel, and Northwest Smith? They are first class, separate, or together. Incidentally this is the best magazine on the newsstand." [Jirel of Joiry will be back in a new adventure next issue, and Northwest Smith will again appear soon.—THE EDITOR.]

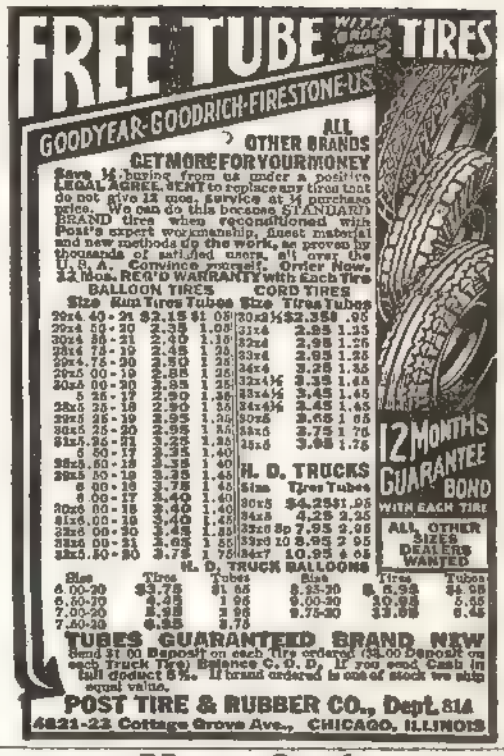
Jirel

Miss W. C. Reinke writes from Seattle: "Have held out for ten years or more now

but am finally compelled to write you. WT has been my only steady during this time and I've accumulated no end of questions and pleas; so hope your patience holds out this time and I'll try not to be a nuisance. . . . I've been waiting patiently or otherwise for more Jirel of Joiry stories. It's been a long, long time. Northwest Smith is grand and the more of him the better, but please, some Jirel of Joiry—there'll never be anyone to compare with her. Have just finished the fine C. A. Smith story in the January issue and hope he keeps it up. His use of words is inspiring—no end. May I rave a little about Edmond Hamilton's *Bride of the Lightning?* I was afraid it wouldn't end the way it did. Will you ask him kindly to write a lot more stories of elementals? . . . Your magazine is grand and I'm very glad to hear that you intend enlarging it."

But We Did Reprint It

Leah Bodine Drake writes from Owensboro, Kentucky: "What would you think if you had wanted something for quite a long time—a very small something, but wanted passionately, all the same!—and all of a sudden, out of the blue, you get it, and from a perfect stranger? Wouldn't you believe (especially at this time of the year) that there was a Santa Claus? This is what happened: for long months, letter after letter, I've asked the editor of WT to pul-*leaze* reprint Merritt's *The Woman of the Wood.* Nothing ever happened; the story didn't appear; the editor, cruel tyrant, would publish my letters, would even publish my own feeble attempts at literature in the form of poetry—but never, oh never, the *W. of the W.* But a good fairy was listening, and the result was that a complete stranger, male or female I know not, but one of the most kind-hearted humans this globe has ever seen (and now I mean *you,* W. Shedlow of Chicago!) took it upon him (her)-self to send me that story, *completely and elegantly typewritten from his or her own copy of it!* Now what do you-all think of anyone so kind, so doggone swell, as to type and send a long manuscript like *The Woman of the Wood* to an utter stranger? I've already sent a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letter of thanks to my own private Santa Claus, alias W. Shedlow, but this is an open letter to all the WT readers and its editor, to tell you all what a grand somebody The Shedlow is! Thanks again right out in public, Friend Shedlow! Now as for the stories in the January number—I liked *Medusa's Coil* best, *Waxworks* next, and *These Doth the Lord Hate* third. The poetry this month was especially good, the Ansley quatrain in particular. It takes genius to put so much of magic and eeriness in four little lines. I am keeping all three of them for my scrap-book, the Ansley, the Petaja and the Starrett poems. Now, as I have gotten my wish in regard to the Merritt story, I'm going to pester poor Editor Wright some more, and ask, 'Please, dear Editor, use Blackwood's *The Willows* for a reprint sometime?' "

Many Thanks to Santa

E. B. Hardy writes from Lewiston, Maine: "Here is the Christmas month, and with it comes news from Santa Claus that the size of WEIRD TALES will be increased. Many thanks to Santa. *Bride of the Lightning* is my favorite story in this issue. Edmond Hamilton seems to have the happy gift of giving just the right ending to an interesting story, and from Virgil Finlay's beautiful illustration at the beginning, on through to its end, *Bride of the Lightning* is wholly satisfying. *Waxworks* is w-e-i-r-d! But a person must have strong nerves to read a Robert Bloch tale and survive. Every now and then someone asks to have WEIRD TALES printed every two weeks, or even every week. I think it would be a good idea if the quality of the magazine wouldn't be harmed in any way. Otherwise, *No!*"

Finlay and Conan

Casimir C. Yehle writes from St. Paul, Minnesota: "This will be my first letter to your Eyrie, and before I begin my tearing down and building up I wish to state that through these many years that I have read WT, I really haven't many complaints to make. It has afforded me many delightful hours of reading. . . . I think that Virgil

Finlay's drawings are the kind that really wake up the imagination. The one story in the January issue is, I think, the story by Cyril Mand, *The Fifth Candle*. It is a tale that I should think will please any who read it. My sentiments were reiterated in one letter that I read in this issue about the Conan stories. Please reprint more of them, and if you put them in book form *save one for me.*"

A Hundred Percenter

Jack O'Neill writes from Seattle: "I became a lurid 100% fan of WT by always reading the Eyrie first. I love its friendliness, its warm-hearted enthusiasm, and now I read every line in WT and can hardly wait for it to come, and I think without any fear of contradiction that I can state that I know WT is the most interesting and satisfying magazine of any kind in the world today."

Touch of the Shivers

Patrick D. Regan writes from Springfield, Missouri: "I read my first copy of your commendable magazine just a few short months ago. During this brief time, I have become a steady reader and admirer of WEIRD TALES. . . . In the December issue, I believe you have a masterpiece in sheer horror. I speak of *Beetles,* by Robert Bloch. The last paragraph in this story was a startling bit of ghastliness. It has my vote for December's best story. Your reprint, *Passing of a God,* was grisly and well done. I didn't care for the first part of the story, but the description of the evil little god was enthralling. I still have a slight touch of the shivers when I think of it. In closing, let me say a word of praise for Virgil Finlay. He is master in the line of portraying horror and beauty. May he and WEIRD TALES long be with us."

Miss Weird Tales

Alice Harding writes from Inglewood, California: "Just a few lines to say how much I enjoy your delightfully different magazine. I have long been a reader of WEIRD TALES and find each issue more fascinating than the last. Your authors are in a

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class by themselves, with Kuttner and Quinn a bit above the rest and with Kelley rising head and shoulders above them all. His *I Found Cleopatra* promises to surpass even *The Last Pharaoh* and that was a literary masterpiece. Let's have him every month. Best wishes to your magazine. I rave about it so much my friends call me Miss WEIRD TALES."

Eery Half-Realms

Samuel V. Cox writes from Indianapolis, Indiana: "To say that I was overjoyed at seeing that the superb artist, Finlay, is not discarded, I fear is putting it mildly. His full-page illustrations of eery bits of classic poetry are exceptionally outstanding and add finesse to a magazine of weird fiction. Truly exceptional fiction when dealing with the occult and the eery half-realms of the unseen worlds is only when the author appeals to the imagination of the reader. No two people possess the same dream worlds, and thus tales that only partly explain eery happenings find the necessary touch that causes chills up and down the spine. H. P. Lovecraft thus in his suggestive tales with no natural explanation of cause and effect topped this field of writing; for (to repeat) each reader interpreted in terms of his dream world the horrible suggestions therein. Psychologists have noted that the prime law of the mental realm is suggestion. WEIRD TALES has achieved a repute untouched by any magazine on the pulp market treating of weird fiction, I believe, purely because of its tendency toward the type of stories as written by HPL and others."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? And if there are any stories that you dislike, we want to know about those, too. Write a letter, or a post card, telling us what you think of the magazine, and send it to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. The most popular story in our January issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *Waxworks,* by Robert Bloch, with Z. B. Bishop's tale of stark horror, *Medusa's Coil,* in second place.

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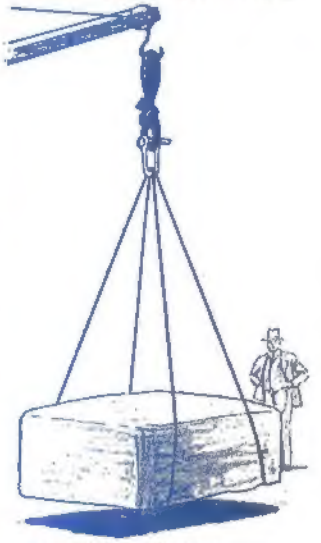

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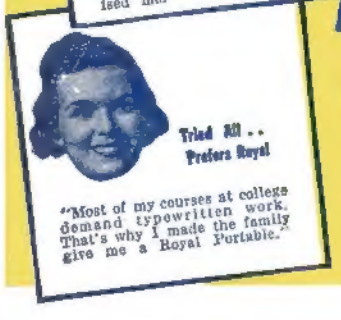

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